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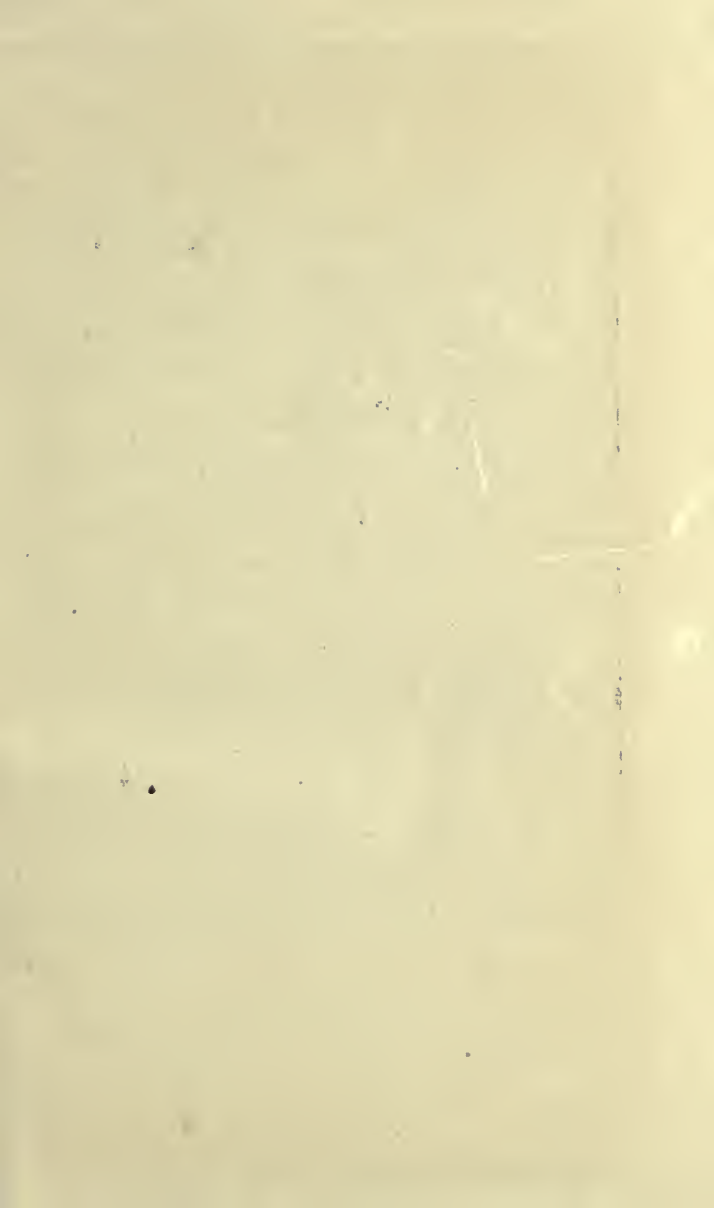
## **FAMOUS FIGHTS OF INDIAN NATIVE REGIMENTS**

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PUBLISHED FOR THE DAILY TELEGRAPH  
BY HODDER & STOUGHTON, WARWICK SQUARE,  
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CHARGE OF BRITISH HUSSARS AGAINST GERMAN CUIRASSIERS IN A VILLAGE  
OF NORTHERN FRANCE.



# IN THE FIRING LINE

STORIES OF THE WAR BY LAND AND SEA

BY

A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

MCMXIV



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# IN THE FIRING LINE

## I

### THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

*"E'en now their vanguard gathers,  
E'en now we face the fray."*

KIPLING.—*Hymn before Action.*

THE War Correspondent has become old-fashioned before he has had time to grow old ; he was made by telegraphy, and wireless has unmade him. The swift transmission of news from the front might gratify us who are waiting anxiously at home, but such news can be caught in the air now, or secretly and as swiftly retransmitted so as to gratify our enemies even more by keeping them well-informed of our strength and intentions and putting them on their guard. Therefore our armies have rightly gone forth on this the greatest war the world has ever seen as they went to the Crusades, with no Press reporter in their

ranks, and when the historian sits down, some peaceful day in the future, to write his prose epic of the Titanic struggle that is now raging over Europe he will have no records of the actual fighting except such as he can gather from the necessarily terse official reports, the published stories of refugees and wounded soldiers that have been picked up by enterprising newspaper men hovering alertly in the rear of the forces, and from the private letters written to their friends by the fighting men themselves.

These letters compensate largely for the ampler, more expert accounts the war correspondent is not allowed to send us. They may tell little of strategic movements or of the full tide and progress of an engagement till you read them in conjunction with the official reports, but in their vivid, spontaneous revelations of what the man in battle has seen and felt, in the intensity of their human interest they have a unique value beyond anything to be found in more professional military or journalistic documents. They so unconsciously express the personality and spirit of their writers; the very homeliness of their language adds wonderfully and unintentionally to their effectiveness; there is rarely any note of boastfulness even in a moment of triumph; they record the most splendid heroisms casually,

sometimes even flippantly, as if it were merely natural to see such things happening about them, or to be doing such things themselves. If they tell of hardships it is to laugh at them ; again and again there are little bursts of affection and admiration for their officers and comrades—they are the most potent of recruiting literature, these letters, for a mere reading of them thrills the stay-at-home with pride that these good fellows are his countrymen and with a sort of angry shame that his age or his safe civilian responsibilities keep him from being out there taking his stand beside them.

The courage, the cheerfulness, the dauntless spirit of them is the more striking when you remember that the vast majority of our soldiers have never been in battle until now. Russia has many veterans from her war with Japan ; France has a few who fought the Prussian enemy in 1870 ; we have some from the Boer war ; but fully three parts of our troops, like all the heroic Belgians, have had their baptism of fire in the present gigantic conflict. And it is curiously interesting to read in several of the letters the frank confession of their writers' feelings when they came face to face for the first time with the menace of death in action. One such note, published in various papers, was from Alfred

Bishop, a sailor who took part in the famous North Sea engagement of August last. His ship's mascot is a black cat, and :

“ Our dear little black kitten sat under our foremost gun,” he writes, “ during the whole battle, and was not frightened at all, only when we first started firing. But afterwards she sat and licked herself. . . . Before we started fighting we were all very nervous, but after we joined in we were all happy and most of us laughing till it was finished. Then we all sobbed and cried. Even if I never come back don't think I died a painful death. Everything yesterday was quick as lightning.”

A wounded English gunner telling of how he went into action near Mons owns to the same touch of nervousness in the first few minutes :

“ What does it feel like to be under fire ? Well, the first shot makes you a bit shaky. It's a surprise packet. You have to wait and keep on moving till you get a chance.” But as soon as the chance came, his shakiness went, and his one desire in hospital was “ to get back to the front as soon as the doctor says I'm fit to man a gun. I don't want to stop here.”

“ I have received my baptism of fire,” writes a young Frenchman at the front to his parents



in Paris. "I heard the bullets whistling at my ears, and saw my poor comrades fall around me. The first minutes are dreadful. They are the worst. You feel wild. You hesitate; you don't know what to do. Then, after a time, you feel quite at your ease in this atmosphere of lead."

"I am in the field hospital now, with a nice little hole in my left shoulder, through which a bullet of one of the War Lord's military subjects has passed," writes a wounded Frenchman to a friend in London. "My shoulder feels much as if some playful joker has touched it with a lighted cigar. . . . It is strange, but in the face of death and destruction I catch myself trying to make out where the shell has fallen, as if I were an interested spectator at a rifle competition. And I was not the only one. I saw many curious faces around me, bearing expressions full of interest, just as if the owners of the respective faces formed the auditorium of a highly fascinating theatrical performance, without having anything to do with the play itself. The impression crossed my mind in one-thousandth part of a second, and was followed by numerous others, altogether alien from the most serious things which were happening and going to happen. The human mind is a curious and complicated thing. Now that we were shooting at the enemy, and often afterwards in the midst of a fierce battle, I heard some

remark made or some funny expression used which proved that the speaker's thoughts were far from realising the terrible facts around him. It has nothing to do with heartlessness or anything like that. I don't know yet what it is. Perhaps I shall have an opportunity to philosophise on it later on."

There is a curious comment in a letter from Sergeant Major MacDermott, who writes during the great retreat from Mons, when everybody had become inured to the atmosphere of the battlefield.

"We're wonderfully cheerful, and happy as bare-legged urchins scampering over the fields," he says, and adds, "It is the quantity not the quality of the German shells that are having effect on us, and it's not so much the actual damage to life as the hellish nerve-racking noise that counts for so much. Townsmen who are used to the noise of the streets can stand it a lot better than the countrymen, and I think you will find that by far the fittest are those regiments recruited in the big cities. A London lad near me says it is no worse than the roar of motor-buses in the City on a busy day."

But the most graphic and minutely detailed picture of the psychic experiences of a soldier

plunged for the first time into the pandemonium of a modern battle is given in the *Retch* by a wounded Russian artillery officer writing from a St. Petersburg hospital.

“I cannot say where we fought, for we are forbidden to divulge that, but I will tell you my own experiences,” he says. “In times of peace one has no conception of what a battle really means. When war was declared our brigade was despatched to the theatre of operations. I went with delight, and so did the others. When we reached our destination we were told that the battle would begin in the morning.

“At daybreak positions were assigned to us, and the commander of the brigade handed us a plan of the action of our artillery. From that moment horror possessed our souls. It was not anxiety for ourselves or fear of the enemy, but a feeling of awe in the face of something unknown. At six o'clock we opened fire at a mark which we could not distinguish, but which we understood to be the enemy.

“Towards midday we were informed that the German cavalry was attempting to envelop our right wing, and were ordered in that direction. Having occupied our new position we waited. Suddenly we see the enemy coming, and at the same time he opens fire on us. We turn our guns upon him, and I give the order to fire. I

myself feel that I am in a kind of nightmare. Our battery officers begin to melt away. I see that the Germans are developing their attack. First one regiment appears, and then another. I direct the guns and pour a volley of projectiles right into the thick of the first regiment. Then a second volley, and a third. I see how they fall among the men, and can even discern the severed limbs of the dead flying into the air after the explosion.

“One of the enemy’s regiments is annihilated. Then a second one. All this time I am pouring missiles in among them. But now the nervous feeling has left me. My soul is filled with hate, and I continue to shoot at the enemy without the least feeling of pity.

“Yet still the enemy is advancing, rushing forward and lying down in turns. I do not understand his tactics, but what are they to me? It is enough for me that I am occupying a favourable position and mowing him down like a strong man with a scythe in a clover field.

“During the first night after the battle I could not sleep a wink. All the time my mind was filled with pictures of the battlefield. I saw German regiments approaching, and myself firing right into the thick of them. Heads, arms, legs, and whole bodies of men were being flung high into the air. It was a dreadful vision.

“I was in four battles. When the second began

I went into it like an automaton. Only your muscles are taxed. All the rest of your being seems paralyzed. So complete is the suspension of the sensory processes that I never felt my wound. All I remember is that a feeling of giddiness came over me, and my head began to swim. Then I swooned to the ground, and was picked up by the Medical Corps and carried to the rear."

## II

### THE FOUR DAYS' BATTLE NEAR MONS

*“ And turning to his men,  
Quoth our brave Henry then,  
‘ Though they be one to ten,  
Be not amazed.’ ”*

MICHAEL DRAYTON.

MOST of us are old enough to remember how, when we entered upon the South African Campaign (as when we started the Crimean and other of our wars) the nation was divided against itself; passionate, bitter controversies were waged between anti-Boer and pro-Boer—between those who considered the war an unjust and those who considered it a just one. This time there has been nothing of that. Sir Edward Grey's resolute efforts for peace proving futile, as soon as Germany tore up her obligations of honour, that “scrap of paper,” and began to pour her huge, boastedly irresistible armies into Belgium, we took up the gauge she so insolently flung to us, and the one feeling from end to end of the



## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 17

Empire was of devout thankfulness that our Government had so instantly done the only right and honourable thing; all political parties, all classes flung their differences behind them unhesitatingly and stood four-square at once against the common enemy. They were heartened by a sense of relief, even, that the swaggering German peril which had been darkly menacing us for years had materialised and was upon us at last, that we were coming to grips with it and should have the chance of ending it once and for ever.

But immediately after our declaration of war on August 4th, a strange secrecy and silence fell like an impenetrable mask over all our military movements. In our cities and towns we were troubled with business disorganisations, but that mystery, that waiting in suspense, troubled us far more. News came that the fighting continued furiously on the Belgian frontier; that it was beginning on the fringes of Alsace; that the Russians were advancing victoriously on East Prussia; and still though our own army was mobilised and we were eagerly starting to raise a new and a larger one, we rightly learned no more, perhaps less, than the enemy could of what our Expeditionary Force was doing or where it was. Last time we were at war we had

seen regiment after regiment go off with bands playing and with cheering multitudes lining the roads as they passed ; this time we had no glimpse of their going ; did not know when they went, or so much as whether they were gone. One day rumour landed them safely in France or Belgium ; the next it assured us that they were not yet ready to embark ; and the next it had rushed them, as by magic, right across Belgium and credited them with standing shoulder to shoulder in the fighting line with the magnificent defenders of Liège. But the glory of that defence, as we were soon to find out, belongs to Belgium alone ; the Germans had hacked their way through and were nearing Mons before our men were able to get far enough north to come in touch with them. Not that they had lost any time on the road. It took a fortnight to mobilise and equip them ; they sailed from Southampton on August 17th, and four days later were at Mons and under fire. This much and more you may gather from a diary-letter that was published in the *Western Daily Press* :

*Letter 1.—From Sapper George Bryant, Royal Engineers, to his father, Mr. J. J. Bryant, of Fishponds :*

Aug. 17.—Sailed from Southampton, on *Manchester Engineer*, 4.45 a.m.



## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 19

Aug. 18.—Landed Rouen, 6.20 a.m. Proceeded to rest camp at the Racecourse, Rouen.

Aug. 19.—Left camp 9 p.m., and entrained to Aulnoye.

Aug. 20.—Marched to Fiezines.

Aug. 21.—Marched to Mons, and proceeded to the canal, to obstacle the bridges and prepare for blowing up. Barricaded the main streets. Saw German cavalry, and was under fire.

Aug. 22.—Severe fighting and terrible. Went to blow up bridges with Lieut. Day, who was shot at my side through the nose. Unable to destroy bridges owing to such heavy firing of the Germans. Sight heart-breaking. Women and children driven from their homes by point of bayonet, and marched through streets in front of Germans, who fired behind them and through their arm-pits. Therefore, our fellows were unable to fire back. They rolled up in thousands, about 100 to our one. Went from here to dig trenches for infantry retreating. Was soon under fire, and had to retreat, and infantry took our position, and were completely wiped out (Middlesex).

Aug. 23.—Severe fighting and bombarding of a town, shells bursting around us. Retreated, and dug trenches for infantry, but soon had

fire about us, and retreated again and marched to take up position for next day, which was to be a rest, us having had but very little.

Aug. 24.—Were unable to rest. Germans pressed us hotly, and fired continually. One of their aeroplanes followed our route, and was fired at. One of our lieutenants chased it, and eventually succeeded in shooting the aviator through the head, and he came to earth. Three aeroplanes were captured this day. We had no close fighting, and marched away to take up a position for next day's fighting, which was a hard day's work.

Aug. 25.—We tried to destroy an orchard, but drew the Germans' artillery fire, which was hot and bursting around us. We continued our work until almost too late, and had to retire to infantry lines, and had it hot in doing so. I was stood next to General Shaw's aide-camp who was badly wounded, but was not touched myself. We dug trenches for infantry, and then marched to join the 2nd Division, but fire was too hot to enable us to do our work. Germans were surrounded by us to the letter "C," and we were waiting for the French to come up on our right flank, but they did not arrive. On returning from the 2nd Division two shells, one after another,

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 21

burst in front of us, first destroying a house ; the second, I received my wound in left leg, being the only fellow hit out of 180. Was placed on tool cart, and taken to Field Hospital, but rest there was short, owing to Germans firing on hospital. Orderlies ran off and left us three to take our chance. Germans blew up church and hospital in same village, and were firing on ours when I was helped out by the other two fellows, and on to a cart, which overtook the ambulance, which I was put on, and travelled all night to St. Quentin and was entrained there at 9.30 a.m. Aug. 26.

Aug. 26.—Travelled all day, reaching Rouen, Aug. 27, and was taken to Field Hospital on Racecourse.

We shall have to wait some time yet for full and coherent accounts of the fierce fighting at Mons, but from the soldiers' letters and the stories of the wounded one gets illuminating glimpses of that terrific four-days' battle.

*Letter 2.—From Driver W. Moore, Royal Field Artillery, to the superintendent of the " Cornwall " training ship, of which Driver Moore is an " old boy " still under twenty :*

It was Sunday night when we saw the enemy. We were ready for action, but were

lying down to have a rest, when orders came to stand at our posts. It was about four a.m. on Monday when we started to fire ; we were at it all day till six p.m., when we started to advance. Then the bugle sounded the charge, and the cavalry and infantry charged like madmen at the enemy ; then the enemy fell back about forty miles, so we held them at bay till Wednesday, when the enemy was reinforced. Then they came on to Mons, and by that time we had every man, woman, and child out of the town.

We were situated on a hill in a cornfield and could see all over the country. It was about three p.m., and we started to let them have a welcome by blowing up two of their batteries in about five minutes ; then the infantry let go, and then the battle was in full swing.

In the middle of the battle a driver got wounded and asked to see the colours before he died, and he was told by an officer that the guns were his colours. He replied, " Tell the drivers to keep their eyes on their guns, because if we lose our guns we lose our colours."

Just then the infantry had to retire, and the gunners had to leave their guns, but the drivers were so proud of their guns that they went and got them out, and we retired to St. Quentin. We had a roll-call, and only ten were left out of my battery. This was the battle in which poor

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 23

Winchester (another old *Cornwall* boy) lost his life in trying to get the guns away.

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*Letter 3.—From Private G. Moody, to his parents at Beckenham :*

I was at Mons in the trenches in the firing-line for twenty-four hours, and my regiment was ordered to help the French on the right. Poor old A Company was left to occupy the trenches and to hold them : whatever might happen, they were not to leave them. There were about 250 of us, and the Germans came on, and as fast as we knocked them over more took their places.

Well, out of 250 men only eighty were left, and we had to surrender. They took away everything, and we were lined up to be shot, so as to be no trouble to them. Then the cavalry of the French made a charge, and the Germans were cut down like grass. We got away, and wandered about all night, never knowing if we were walking into our chaps or the Germans. After walking about some time we commenced falling down through drinking water that had been poisoned, and then we were put into some motor-wagons and taken to Amiens.

---



*Letter 4.—From a Lincolnshire Sergeant to his brother :*

It came unexpectedly. The first inkling we had was just after reveille, when our cavalry pickets fell back and reported the presence of the enemy in strength on our front and slightly to the left. In a few minutes we were all at our posts without the slightest confusion, and as we lay down in the trenches our artillery opened fire. It was a fine sight to see the shells speeding through the air to pay our respects to Kaiser Bill and his men. Soon the Germans returned the compliment ; but they were a long time in finding anything approaching the range, and they didn't know of shelters—a trick we learned from the Boers, I believe. After about half an hour of this work their infantry came into view along our front. They were in solid square blocks standing out sharply against the skyline, and we couldn't help hitting them. We lay in our trenches with not a sound or sign to tell them of what was before them. They crept nearer and nearer, and then our officers gave the word. Under the storm of bullets they seemed to stagger like drunken men, after which they made a run for us shouting some outlandish cry that we could not make out. Half way across the open another volley tore through their ranks, and by this time our artillery began dropping shells around them. Then an officer gave an order, and

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 25

they broke into open formation, rushing like mad things towards the trenches on our left. Some of our men continued the volley firing, but a few of the crack shots were told off to indulge in independent firing for the benefit of the Germans. That is another trick taught us by Brother Boer, and our Germans did not like it at all. They fell back in confusion and then lay down wherever cover was available.

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*Letter 5.—From Private Levy, Royal Munster Fusiliers :*

We were sent up to the firing line to try and save a battery. When we got there we found that they were nearly all killed or wounded. Our Irish lads opened fire on the dirty Germans, and you should have seen them fall. It was like a game of skittles. But as soon as you knocked them down up came another thousand or so. We could not make out where they came from. So, all of a sudden, our officers gave us the order to charge. We fixed bayonets and went like fire through them. You should have seen them run !

We had two companies of ours there against about 3,000 of theirs, and I tell you it was warm. I was not sorry when night-time came, but that

was not all. You see, we had no horses to get those guns away, and our chaps would not leave them.

We dragged them ourselves to a place of safety. As the firing line was at full swing we had with us an officer of the Hussars. I think he was next to me, and he had his hand nearly blown off by one of the German shells. So I and two more fellows picked him up and took him to a place of safety, where he got his wound cared for. I heard afterwards that he had been sent home, poor fellow.

---

*Letter 6.—From Sergeant A. J. Smith, 1st Lincolnshire Regiment :*

We smashed up the Kaiser's famous regiment—the Imperial Guards—and incidentally they gave us a shaking. They caught me napping. I got wounded on Sunday night, but I stuck it until Thursday. I could then go no further, so they put me in the ambulance and sent me home. It was just as safe in the firing line as in the improvised hospital, as when our force moved the Germans closed up and shelled the hospitals and burned the villages to the ground.

We started on Sunday, and were fighting and marching until Thursday. Troops were



## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 27

falling asleep on the roadside until the shells started dropping, then we were very much awake.

I feel proud to belong to the British Army for the way in which they bore themselves in front of the other nations. No greater tribute could be paid us than what a German officer, who was captured, said. He said it was inferno to stand up against the British Army.

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*Letter 7.—From Private J. R. Tait, of the 2nd Essex Regiment :*

We were near Mons when we had the order to entrench. It was just dawn when we were half-way down our trenches, and we were on our knees when the Germans opened a murderous fire with their guns and machine guns. We opened a rapid fire with our Maxims and rifles ; we let them have it properly, but no sooner did we have one lot down than up came another lot, and they sent their cavalry to charge us, but we were there with our bayonets, and we emptied our magazines on them. Their men and horses were in a confused heap. There were a lot of wounded horses we had to shoot to end their misery. We had several charges with their infantry, too. We find they don't like the bayonets. Their

rifle shooting is rotten ; I don't believe they could hit a haystack at 100 yards. We find their Field Artillery very good ; we don't like their shrapnel ; but I noticed that some did not burst ; if one shell that came over me had burst I should have been blown to atoms ; I thanked the Lord it did not. I also heard our men singing that famous song : " Get out and get under." I know that for an hour in our trench it would make anyone keep under, what with their shells and machine guns. Many poor fellows went to their death like heroes.

---

*Letter 8.—From an Oldham Private to his wife at Waterhead :*

We have had a terrible time, and were in action for three days and nights. On Wednesday the officers said that Spion Kop was heaven to the fighting we had on that day. It is God help our poor fellows who get wounded in the legs or body and could not get off the battle-field, as when we retired the curs advanced and shot and bayonnetted them as they tried to crawl away. They are rotten shots with the rifles. If they stood on Blackpool sands I don't believe they could hit the sea, but they are very good with the shrapnel guns, and nearly all our

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 29

wounded have been hit with shrapnel bullets. Each shrapnel shell contains about 200 bullets which scatter all around, so just think what damage one shell can do when it drops among a troop of soldiers.

On the Tuesday our regiment went to the top of a hill which had a big flat top. An outpost of a Scotch regiment reported to us on our way up that all was clear, and we thought the enemy were about five miles away. We formed up in close formation—about 1,200 strong. Our commanding officer told us to pull our packs off, and start entrenching, but this was the last order he will ever give, for the enemy opened fire at us with five Maxim guns from a wood only 400 yards in front of us. They mowed us down like straw, and we could get no cover at all. Those who were left had to roll off the hill into the roadway—a long straight road—but we got it worse there. They had two shrapnel guns at the top of the road, and they did fearful execution to us and the Lancashire Fusiliers, who were also in the roadway. Any man who got out of that hell-hole should shake hands with himself.

This all happened before six o'clock in the morning. I have only seen about sixty of our regiment since. Our Maxim gun officer tried to fix his gun up during their murderous fire, but he got half his face blown away. We retired in splendid order about 300 yards, and

then lined a ridge. Up to then we hardly fired a shot. They had nearly wiped three regiments out up to then, but our turn came. We gave them lead as fast as we could pull the triggers, and I think we put three Germans out to every one of our men accounted for. Bear in mind, they were about 250,000 strong to our 50,000. We got three Germans, and they said their officers told them that we were Russians and that England had not sent any men to fight.

They made us retire about five miles, and then we got the master of them, because our guns came up and covered the ground with dead Germans. The German gunners are good shots, but ours are a lot better. After we had shelled them a bit we got them on the run, and we drove them back to three miles behind where the battle started. We did give it them. I will say this, none of our soldiers touched any wounded Germans, though it took us all our time to keep our bayonets out of their ribs after seeing what they did with our wounded. But, thank God, we governed our tempers and left them alone.

I said we got the Germans on the run. And they can run! I picked up a few trophies and put them in my pack, but I got it blown off my back almost, so I had to discard it. I got one in the ribs, and then a horse got shot and fell on top of me, putting my shoulder out again and crushing my ribs. Otherwise I am fit to tackle a few

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 31

more Germans, and I hope I shall soon be back again at the front to get a bit of my own back.

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*Letter 9.—From a private of the 1st Lincolns to friends at Barton-on-Humber :*

Just a line to tell you I have returned from the front, and I can tell you we have had a very trying time of it. I must also say I am very lucky to be here. We were fighting from Sunday, 23rd, to Wednesday evening, on nothing to eat or drink—only the drop of water in our bottles which we carried. No one knows—only those that have seen us could credit such a sight, and if I live for years may I never see such a sight again. I can tell you it is not very nice to see your chum next to you with half his head blown off. The horrible sights I shall never forget. There seemed nothing else only certain death staring us in the face all the time. I cannot tell you all on paper. We must, however, look on the bright side, for it is no good doing any other. There are thousands of these Germans and they simply throw themselves at us. It is no joke fighting seven or eight to one. I can tell you we have lessened them a little, but there are millions more yet to finish.

---

*Letter 10.—From one of the 9th Lancers to friends at  
Alfreton :*

I was at the great battle of Mons, and got a few shots in me. Once I was holding my officer's horse and my own, when, all of a sudden, a German shell came over and burst. Both horses were killed. I got away with my left hand split and three fingers blown in pieces. I am recovering rather quickly. I shall probably have to lose one or two of my fingers. I had two bullets taken from my body on Tuesday, and I can tell you I am in pain. I think I am one of the luckiest men in the world to escape as I did. War is a terrible thing. It is a lot different to what most of us expected. Women and children leaving their homes with their belongings—then all of a sudden their houses would be in ashes, blown to the ground. I shall be glad to get well again. Then I can go and help again to fight the brutal Germans. The people in France and Belgium were so kind and good to our soldiers. They gave everything they possibly could do.

I have not heard from Jack (his brother, also at the front). I do so hope he will come back.

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*Drawn by F. Matania.*

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THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE LANDS IN FRANCE, AUGUST, 1914.





## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 33

*Letter II.—From a wounded Gordon Highlander to his father, Mr. Alexander Buchan, of Monymusk :*

We had a pretty stiff day of it last Sunday. The battalion went into small trenches in front of a wood a few miles to the right of Mons, and the Germans had the range to a yard. I was on the right edge of the wood with the machine guns, and there wasn't half some joy.

The shells were bursting all over the place. It was a bit of a funny sensation for a start, but you soon got used to it. You would hear it coming singing through the air over your head ; then it would give a mighty big bang and you would see a great flash, and there would be a shower of lumps of iron and rusty nails all around your ears. They kept on doing that all Sunday ; sometimes three or four at the same time, but none of them hit me. I was too fly for them.

Their artillery is pretty good, but the infantry are no good at all. They advance in close column, and you simply can't help hitting them. I opened fire on them with the machine gun and you could see them go over in heaps, but it didn't make any difference. For every man that fell ten took his place. That is their strong point. They have an unlimited supply of men.

They think they can beat any army in the world simply by hurling great masses of troops against them, but they are finding out their

mistake now that they are put up against British troops. The reason for the British retreat is this—all up through France are great lines of entrenchments and fortresses, and as they have not enough men to defeat the Germans in open battle, they are simply retiring from position to position—holding the Germans for a few days and then retiring to the next one. All this is just to gain time. Our losses are pretty severe, but they are nothing to the Germans, whose losses are ten to every one of ours.

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*Letter 12.—From Private J. Willis, of the Gordon Highlanders :*

You mustn't run away with the notion that we stand shivering or cowering under shell fire, for we don't. We just go about our business in the usual way. If it's potting at the Germans that is to the fore we keep at it as though nothing were happening, and if we're just having a wee bit chat among ourselves we keep at it all the same.

Last week when I got this wound in my leg it was because I got excited in an argument with wee Georgie Ferriss, of our company, about Queen's Park Rangers and their chances this season. One of my chums was hit when he

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stood up to light a cigarette while the Germans were blazing away at us.

Keep your eyes wide open and you will have a big surprise sooner than you think. We're all right, and the Germans will find that out sooner than you at home.

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*Letter 13.—From Private G. Kay, of the 2nd Royal Scots, to his employer, a milkman, at Richmond :*

You will be surprised to hear I am home from Belgium in hospital with a slight wound in my heel from shrapnel. I had a narrow escape in Wednesday's battle at or near Mons, as I was with the transport, and it was surrounded twice.

The last time I made holes in the stable wall, and had a good position for popping them off—and I did, too ; but somehow they got to know where we were, and shelled us for three hours. Off went the roof, and off went the roof of other buildings around us. At last a shell exploded and set fire to our cooking apparatus and our stables. We had twenty-two fine horses, and all the transport in this stable yard. We hung on for orders to remove the horses. None came. At last a shell like a thunderbolt struck

the wall, and down came half the stables, and as luck would have it, as we retired—only about six of us—my brother-in-law, the chap you were going to start when we were called up, went to the right and I went to the left. Just then a shell burst high and struck several down in the yard—it was then I got hit—smashed the butt of my rifle, and sent me silly for five minutes. Then I heard a major say, “For yourselves, boys.” I looked for my brother-in-law, but he was not to be seen, and I have not heard of him since. During all this time the fire was spreading rapidly. I was told to go back and cut the horses loose. I did so, and some of them got out, but others were burnt to death.

Then God answered my prayer, and I had strength to run through a line of rifle fire over barbed wire covered by a hedge, and managed to get out of rifle range, three hundred yards or four hundred yards away, and then I fell for want of water. I just had about two teaspoonfuls in my bottle, and then I went on struggling my way through hedges to a railway line.

When I got through I saw an awful sight—a man of the Royal Irish with six wounds from shrapnel. He asked me for water, but I had none. I managed to carry him about half a mile, and then found water. I stuck to him though he was heavy and I was feeling

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weak and tired. I had to carry him through a field of turnips, and half way I slipped and both fell. I then had a look back and could see the fire mountains high.

I then saw one of my own regiment, and called to him to stay with this man while I went for a shutter or a door, which I got, and with the help of two Frenchmen soon got him to a house and dressed him. We were being shelled again from the other end of the village then. We were about fifteen strong, as some slightly wounded came up and some not wounded. We got him away, and then met a company of Cameron Highlanders, and handed him over to them.

I think I marched nearly sixty-three miles, nearly all on one foot, and at last I got a horse and made my way to Mons, where I was put in the train for Havre.

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*Letter 14.—From Sergeant Taylor, of the R.H.A. :*

Our first brush with the enemy was on August 21st, about thirty miles from Mons, but Mons, my goodness, it was just like Brock's benefit at Belle Vue, and you would have thought it was hailing. Of course, we were returning the compliment. The Germans always found the range, which proved they had good maps, yet



in their anxiety they tried to fire too many shells, the consequence being that a lot of them were harmless, and they did not give themselves time to properly fuse them. Only on one day—from the 21st to my leaving—did we miss an action. In General French's report you will, no doubt, see where the 5th Brigade accounted for two of the German cavalry regiments, of which only six troopers were taken prisoners; the rest bit the dust. One of these regiments was the Lancers, of which the late Queen was honorary colonel.

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*Letter 15.—From Private J. Atkinson, of the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, to his wife at Leeds :*

Talk about a time ! I would not like to go through the same again for love or money.

It is not war. It is murder. The Germans are murdering our wounded as fast as they come across them. I gave myself up for done a week last Sunday night, as we were in the thick of the fight at Mons. Our regiment started fighting with 1,009 and finished with 106 and three officers. That made 109, as we just lost 900. It was cruel. At one place we were at there were six streets of the town where all the

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 39

women were left widows, and were all wearing the widows' weeds. The French regiment that fought there was made up in the town and they got wiped out.

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*Letter 16.—From Private Robert Robertson, of the Argylls, to his parents at Musselburgh :*

The poor Argylls got pretty well hit, but never wavered a yard for all their losses. The Scots Greys are doing great work at the front—in fact they were the means of putting ten thousand Germans to their fate on Sunday morning. I will never forget that day, as our regiment left a town on the French frontier on Saturday morning at 3 o'clock and marched till 3 a.m. on Sunday into a Belgian town. I was about to have an hour in bed, at least a lie down in a shop, when I was wakened to go on guard at the General's headquarters, and while I was on guard a Captain of the crack French cavalry came in with the official report of the ten thousand Germans killed. The Scots Greys, early that morning, had decoyed the Germans right in front of the machine guns of the French, and they just mowed them down. There was no escape for them, poor devils, but they deserve it the way they go on. You would be sorry for the poor

Belgian women having to leave their homes with young children clinging to them. One sad case we came across on the roadside was a woman just out of bed two days after giving birth to a child. The child was torn from her breast, and her breast cut off that the infant was sucking. Then the Germans bayoneted the child before the mother's eyes. We did the best we could for her, but she died about six hours after telling us her hardships.

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*Letter 17.—From Private Whitaker, of the Coldstream Guards :*

You thought it was a big crowd that streamed out of the Crystal Palace when we went to see the Cup Final. Well, outside Compiègne it was just as if that crowd came at us. You couldn't miss them. Our bullets ploughed into them, but still they came for us. I was well entrenched, and my rifle got so hot I could hardly hold it. I was wondering if I should have enough bullets, when a pal shouted, "Up, Guards, and at 'em!" The next second he was rolled over with a nasty knock on the shoulder. He jumped up and hissed, "Let me get at them!" His language was a bit stronger than that.

When we really did get the order to get at



## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 41

them we made no mistake, I can tell you. They cringed at the bayonet, but those on our left wing tried to get round us, and after racing as hard as we could for quite five hundred yards we cut up nearly every man who did not run away.

You have read of the charge of the Light Brigade. It was nowt to our cavalry chaps. I saw two of our fellows who were unhorsed stand back to back and slash away with their swords, bringing down nine or ten of the panic-stricken devils. Then they got hold of the stirrup-straps of a horse without a rider, and got out of the *melée*. This kind of thing was going on all day.

In the afternoon I thought we should all get bowled over, as they came for us again in their big numbers. Where they came from, goodness knows; but as we could not stop them with bullets they had another taste of the bayonet. My captain, a fine fellow, was near to me, and as he fetched them down he shouted, "Give them socks, my lads!" How many were killed and wounded I don't know; but the field was covered with them.

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*Letter 18.—From a private in the Coldstream Guards to his mother :*

First of all I sailed from Southampton on August 12th on a cattle boat called the *Cawdor*

*Castle.* We sailed at 9.30 at night, and after a passage of  $14\frac{1}{2}$  hours landed at Le Havre, on the coast of France. We went into camp there, and then left on August 14th, getting into a train, not third class carriages, but cattle trucks. We were on the train eighteen and a half hours, and I was a bit stiff when I got out at a place called Wassigny. Then we marched through pouring rain to a village, where we slept in some barns. The next day being Sunday, August 16th, we got on the march to a place called Grooges, a distance of about nine miles. We stayed there till Thursday.

Then we started to march to get into Belgium. We got there on Sunday, the 23rd, just outside Mons. We dug trenches, from which we had to retire, and then we got into a position, and there I saw the big battle, but could not do anything, because we were with the artillery. We retreated into France, being shelled all the way, and on the Tuesday, the 25th, we marched into Landrecies. We arrived there about one o'clock and were thinking ourselves lucky. We considered we were going to have two days' rest, but about five o'clock the alarm was raised. The Germans got to the front of us and were trying to get in the town. So we fixed our bayonets, doubled up the road, and the fight started. The German artillery shelled us, and some poor chaps got hit badly. The chap next to me got shot,

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 43

and I tried to pull him out of the road, so that I could get down in his place, as there was not room for us all in the firing line. We had to lay down behind and wait our chance. I had got on my knees, and just got hold of his leg, when something hit my rifle and knocked it out of my hand, and almost at the same time a bullet went right through my arm. It knocked me over, and I must have bumped my head, for I do not remember any more till I felt someone shaking me. It was the doctor—a brave man, for he came right up amongst the firing to tend the wounded. He bandaged my arm up, and I had to get to hospital, a mile and a half away, as best I could.

The beasts of Germans shelled the building all night long without hitting it. We moved next morning, and by easy stages left for England. I am going on fine; shall soon be back and at it again I expect. Keep up your spirits, won't you? I believe it was only your prayers at home that guarded me that Tuesday night, simply awful it was.

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*Letter 19.—From a wounded English Officer, in a Belgian hospital, to his mother :*

I do not know if this letter will ever get to you or not, but I am writing on the chance

that it will. A lot has happened since I last wrote to you. We marched straight up to Belgium from France, and the first day we arrived my company was put on outposts for the night. During the night we dug a few trenches, etc., so did not get much sleep. The next day the Germans arrived, and I will try and describe the fight. We were only advanced troops of a few hundred holding the line of a canal. The enemy arrived about 50,000 strong. We held them in check all day and killed hundreds of them, and still they came. Finally, of course, we retired on our main body. I will now explain the part I played. We were guarding a railway bridge over a canal. My company held a semicircle from the railway to the canal. I was nearest the railway. A Scottish regiment completed the semicircle on the right of the railway to the canal. The railway was on a high embankment running up to the bridge, so that the Scottish regiment was out of sight of us. We held the Germans all day, killing hundreds, when about five p.m. the order to retire was eventually given. It never reached us, and we were left all alone. The Germans therefore got right up to the canal on our right, hidden by the railway embankment, and crossed the railway. Our people had blown up the bridge before their departure. We found ourselves between two fires, and I realized we had

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 45

about 2,000 Germans and a canal between myself and my friends.

We decided to sell our lives dearly: I ordered my men to fix bayonets and charge, which the gallant fellows did splendidly, but we got shot down like nine-pins. As I was loading my revolver after giving the order to fix bayonets I was hit in the right wrist. I dropped my revolver, my hand was too weak to draw my sword. This afterwards saved my life. I had not got far when I got a bullet through the calf of my right leg and another in my right knee, which brought me down. The rest of my men got driven round into the trench on our left. The officer there charged the Germans and was killed himself, and nearly all the men were either killed or wounded. I did not see this part of the business, but from all accounts the gallant men charged with the greatest bravery. Those who could walk the Germans took away as prisoners. I have since discovered from civilians that around the bridge 5,000 Germans were found dead and about 60 English. These 60 must have been nearly all my company, who were so unfortunately left behind.

As regards myself, when I lay upon the ground I found my coat sleeve full of blood, and my wrist spurting blood, so I knew an artery of some sort must have been cut. The



Germans had a shot at me when I was on the ground to finish me off ; that shot hit my sword, which I wore on my side, and broke in half just below the hilt ; this turned the bullet off and saved my life. I afterwards found that two shots had gone through my field glasses, which I wore on my belt, and another had gone through my coat pocket, breaking my pipe and putting a hole through a small collapsible tin cup, which must have turned the bullet off me. We lay out there all night for twenty-four hours. I had fainted away from loss of blood, and when I lost my senses I thought I should never see anything again. Luckily I had fallen on my wounded arm, and the arm being slightly twisted I think the weight of my body stopped the flow of blood and saved me. At any rate, the next day civilians picked up ten of us who were still alive, and took us to a Franciscan convent, where we have been splendidly looked after. All this happened on August 23rd, it is now September 3rd. I am ever so much better, and can walk about a bit now, and in a few days will be quite healed up. It is quite a small hole in my wrist, and it is nearly healed, and my leg is much better ; the bullets escaped the bones, so that in a week I shall be quite all right. Unfortunately the Germans are at present in possession of this district, so that I am more or less a prisoner here. But I hope the English will be here

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 47

in a week, when I shall be ready to rejoin them.

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*Letter 20.—From W. Hawkins, of the 3rd Coldstream Guards :*

I have a nasty little hole through my right arm, but I am one of the lucky ones. My word, it was hot for us. On the Tuesday night when I got my little lot, what I saw put me in mind of a farmer's machine cutting grass, as the Germans fell just like it. We only lost nine poor fellows, and the German losses amounted to 1,500 and 2,000. So you can guess what it was like. As they were shot down others took their place, as there were thousands of them. The best friend is your rifle with the bayonet. But I soon had mine blown to pieces. How it happened I don't know. . . . I got a bullet through the top of my hat. I will bring my hat home and show you. I felt it go through, but it never as much as bruised my head. I had then no rifle, so I was obliged to keep down my head. The bullets were whirling over me by the hundred. I stopped until they got a bit slower, and then I got up and was trying to pull a fellow away that had been shot through the head when I managed to receive a bullet through my arm. When I looked in the direction of the enemy I could see them



coming by the thousand. Off I went. I bet I should easily have won the mile that night. I got into the hospital at Landricca amid shot and shell, which were flying by as fast as you like. I got my arm done, and was put to bed. All that night the enemy were trying to blow up the hospital, where they had to turn out the lights so that the Germans could not get the correct range. Then we were taken away in R.A.M.C. vans to Guise, where we slept on the station platform after a nice supper which the French provided.

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*Letter 21.—From Sergeant Griffiths, of the Welsh Regiment, to his parents at Swansea :*

The fighting at Mons was terrible, and it was here that our 4th and 5th Divisions got badly knocked, but fought well. Our artillery played havoc with them. About 10 o'clock on Monday we were suddenly ordered to quit, and quick, too, and no wonder. They were ten to one. Then began that retreat which will go down in history as one of the greatest and most glorious retirements ever done. Our boys were cursing because our backs were towards them ; but when the British did turn, my word, what a game ! The 3rd Coldstreams should be named " 3rd Cold

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Steels," and no error. Their bayonet charge was a beauty.

Among numerous other such letters that have been published up and down the country is this in which a corporal of the North Lancashire Regiment gives a graphic little picture of his experiences to the *Manchester City News* :

When we got near Mons the Germans were nearer than we expected. They must have been waiting for us. We had little time to make entrenchments, and had to do the digging lying on our stomachs. Only about 300 of the 1,000 I was with got properly entrenched. The Germans shelled us heavily, and I got a splinter in the leg. It is nearly right now, and I hope soon to go back again. We lost fairly heavily, nearly all from artillery fire. Altogether I was fighting for seventy-two hours before I was hit. The German forces appeared to be never-ending. They were round about us like a swarm of bees, and as fast as one man fell, it seemed, there were dozens to take his place.

There is one in which James Scott, reservist, tells his relatives at Jarrow that British soldiers at Mons dropped like logs. The enemy were shot down as they came up, but it was like knocking over beehives—a hundred came up for every one knocked down. He thought the Germans

were the worst set of men he had ever seen. Their cavalry drove women and children in front of them in the streets of Mons so that the British could not fire.

A wounded non-commissioned officer of the Pompadours, whose regiment left Wembley Park a week before the fighting began, says that in the four days' battle commencing at Mons on the Sunday, August 23rd, and lasting until August 26th, they were continually under fire :

We had to beat off several cavalry attacks as well as infantry, and when the trouble seemed to be over the Germans played on us with shrapnel just like turning on a fire hose. Several of our officers were hit on Wednesday. Heavy German cavalry charged us with drawn sabres, and we only had a minute's warning "to prepare to receive cavalry." We left our entrenchments, and rallying in groups, emptied our magazines into them as they drew near. Men and horses fell in confused heaps. It was a terrible sight. Still, on they came. They brought their naked sabres to the engage, and we could distinctly hear their words of command made in that piercing, high tone of voice which the Germans affect.

The enemy had a terrible death roll before their fruitless charge was completed, a thick line of dead and wounded marking the ground over which they had charged. We shot the wounded

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 51

horses, to put them out of their misery, whilst our ambulances set to work to render aid to the wounded. Our Red Cross men make no distinction. Friend and foe get the same medical treatment, that's where we score over the Germans.

If they had been Uhlans we should not have spared them, as we owe them a grudge for rounding up some Tommies who were bathing. They took their clothes away, and tied the men to trees. We swore to give them a warm time wherever we met them.

A wounded corporal writes :

It looked as if we were going to be snowed under. The mass of men that came at us was an avalanche, and every one of us must have been simply trodden to death and not killed by bullets or shells when our cavalry charged into them on the left wing, not 500 yards from the trench I was in, and cut them up. Our lads did the rest, but the shells afterwards laid low a lot of them.

The following is an extract from a letter received by a gardener from his son :

You complained last year of the swarms of wasps that destroyed your fruit. Well, dad, they were certainly not larger in number than the Germans who came for us. The Germans are cowards when they get the bayonets at them. A young lieutenant, I don't know his name, was

one of the coolest men I have ever seen, and didn't he encourage our chaps ! I saw him bring down a couple of Germans who were leading half a company.

A fact that stands out continually in these tales of eye-witnesses is the overwhelming numbers in which the Germans were hurled upon them. One says they seemed to be rising up endlessly out of the very ground, and as fast as one mass was shot down another surged into its place ; the innumerable horde is compared by various correspondents to " a great big battering-ram," to a gigantic swarm of wasps, to a swarm of bees, to a flock of countless thousands of sheep trying to rush out of a field ; to the unceasing pouring of peas out of a sack. It was the sheer mass and weight of this onrush that forced the small British army back on its systematic, triumphant retreat, and probably the most striking little sketch of this phase of the conflict is that supplied by an Irish soldier invalided to Belfast, which I include in the following selection of hospital stories.

The last few weeks have been like a dream to me, says a wounded private of the Middlesex Regiment. After we landed at Boulogne we were magnificently treated, and everyone was in the highest spirits. Then we set off on our



## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 53

marching. We were all anxious to have a slap at the Germans. My word! If they only knew in our country how the Germans are treating our wounded there would be the devil to pay.

It was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Mons, I believe, that we got our first chance. We had been marching for days with hardly any sleep. When we took up our position the Germans were nearer than we thought, because we had only just settled down to get some rest when there came the blinding glare of the searchlight. This went away almost as suddenly as it appeared, and it was followed by a perfect hail of bullets. We lost a good many in the fight, but we were all bitterly disappointed when we got the order to retire. I got a couple of bullets through my leg, but I hope it won't be long before I get back again. We never got near enough to use our bayonets. I only wish we had done. Talk about civilized warfare! Don't you believe it. The Germans are perfect fiends.

### IN HOSPITAL.

#### (I) *At Southampton.*

The first batch of wounded soldiers arrived at Netley on the 28th August, coming from Southampton Docks by the hospital train. A *Daily Telegraph* correspondent was one of a quiet band of people who had waited silently

for many long hours on the platform that runs alongside the hospital for the arrival of the disabled soldiers who had fought so heroically at Mons ; and this is his account of what he saw :

Colonel Lucas and staff were all in readiness. Here were wheeling chairs, there stretchers. The preparations for the reception of the broken Tommies could not have been better, more elaborate, or more humane. It was the humanity of it all—the quiet consideration that told of complete preparedness—that made not the least moving chapter of the story that I have to tell. And out of the train stern-faced men began to hobble, many with their arms in a sling.

Here was a hairless-faced, boyish-looking fellow, with his head enveloped in snowy-white bandages ; his cheeks were red and healthy, his eyes bright and twinkling. There was pain written across his young face, but he walked erect and puffed away at a cigarette. One man, with arms half clinging round the neck of two injured comrades, went limping to the reception-room, his foot the size of three, and as he went by he smiled and joked because he could only just manage to get along.

When the last of the soldiers able to walk found his way into the hospital, there to be refreshed with tea or coffee or soup, before he



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was sent to this or that ward, the more seriously wounded were carried from the train. How patient, how uncomplaining were these fellows ! One, stretched out on a mattress, with his foot smashed, chatted and smoked until his turn came to be wheeled away. And when the last of these wounded heroes had been lifted out of the train I took myself to the reception-room, and there heard many stories that, though related with the simplicity of the true soldier, were wonderful.

The wounded men were of all regiments and spoke all dialects. They were travel-stained and immensely tired. Pain had eaten deep lines into many of their faces, but there were no really doleful looks. They were faces that seemed to say : " Here we are ; what does it all matter ; it is good to be alive ; it might have been worse."

I sat beside a private, named Cox. An old warrior he looked. His fine square jaw was black with wire-like whiskers. His eyes shone with the fire of the man who had suffered, so it seemed, some dreadful nightmare.

" And you want me to tell you all about it. Well, believe me, it was just hell. I have been through the Boxer campaign ; I went through the Boer War, but I have never seen anything so terrible as that which happened last Sunday. It all happened so sudden. We believed that the Germans were some fifteen miles away, and

all at once they opened fire upon us with their big guns.

"Let me tell you what happened to my own regiment. When a roll call of my company was taken there were only three of us answered, me and two others." When he had stilled his emotion, he went on. "So unexpected and so terrible was the attack of the enemy, and so overwhelming were their numbers, that there was no withstanding it."

Before fire was opened a German aeroplane flew over our troops, and the deduction made by Private Cox and several of his comrades, with whom I chatted, was that the aeroplane was used as a sort of index to the precise locality of our soldiers, and, further, that the Germans, so accurate was their gunnery, had been over this particular battlefield before they struck a blow, and so had acquired an intimate knowledge of the country. Trenches that were dug by our men served as little protection from the fire.

Said Cox: "No man could have lived against such a murderous attack. There was a rain of lead, a deluge of lead, and, talk about being surprised, well, I can hardly realise that, and still less believe what happened."

By the side of Cox sat a lean, fair-haired, freckle-faced private. "That's right," he said, by way of corroborating Cox. "They were fair devils," chimed in an Irishman, who later told

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 57

me that he came from Connemara. "You could do nothing with them, but I say they are no d—— good as riflemen."

"No, they're not, Mike," ventured a youth. "We got within 400 yards of them, and they couldn't hit us."

"But," broke in the man of Connemara, "they are devils with the big guns, and their aim was mighty good, too. If it had not been they wouldn't have damaged us as they have done."

A few yards away was another soldier, also seated in a wheeling chair, with a crippled leg—a big fine fellow he was. He told me his corps had been ambushed, and that out of 120 only something like twenty survived.

On all hands I heard all too much to show that the battle of Mons was a desperate affair. Two regiments suffered badly, but there was no marked disposition on the part of any of the soldiers with whom I chatted to enlarge upon the happenings of last week-end. Rather would they talk more freely of the awful atrocities perpetrated by the Germans.

"Too awful for words," one said. "Their treatment of women will remain as a scandal as long as the world lasts. We shall never forget; we shall never forgive. I wish I was back again at the front. Englishmen have only got to realise what devilish crimes are being committed by these Germans to want to go and

take a hand in the fight. Women were shot, and so were young girls. In fact, it did not seem to matter to the Germans who they killed, and they seemed to take a delight in burning houses and spreading terror everywhere.

"I have got one consolation, I helped to catch four German spies."

#### IN HOSPITAL.

##### (2) *At Belfast.*

About 120 officers and men arrived in Belfast on August 31st, direct from the Continent. They were brought here, says the *Daily Telegraph* local correspondent, to be near their friends, for the men had been in Ulster for a long time before leaving for the front, being stationed in Belfast and later in Londonderry. They sailed from this city for the theatre of war on August 14th, to the number of 900. It was remarkable to note how many of them were injured in the legs and feet. All were conveyed to the hospital at the Victoria Military Barracks. The men were glad to see Belfast again, but those to whom I spoke will be bitterly disappointed if they do not get another opportunity for paying off their score against the Germans.

One soldier told me a plain straightforward story, without any embellishments. What made

## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 59

his tale doubly interesting was the fact that he spoke with the experience of a veteran, having gone through the South African War.

Where the Germans had the advantage, he said, was in the apparently endless number of reserves. No sooner did we dispose of one regiment than another regiment took its place. It just put me in mind of the Niagara Falls—the terrible rush threatening to carry everything before it.

No force on earth could have withstood that cataract, and the fact that our men only fell back a little was the best proof of their strength. At one stage there were, I am sure, six Germans to every one of us. Yet we held our ground, and would still have held it but for the fact that after we had dealt with the men before us another force came on, using the bodies of their dead comrades as a carpet.

The South African War was a picnic compared with this, and on the way home I now and again recoiled with horror as I thought of the awful spectacle which was witnessed before we left the front of piled-up bodies of the German dead. We lost heavily, but the German casualties must have been appalling.

You must remember that for almost twenty-four hours we bore the brunt of the attack, and the desperate fury with which the Germans fought showed that they believed if they were



only once past the British forces the rest would be easy. Not only so, but I am sure we had the finest troops in the German army against us.

On the way out I heard some slighting comments passed on the German troops, and no doubt some of them are not worth much, but those thrown at us were very fine specimens indeed. I do not think they could have been beaten in that respect.

#### IN HOSPITAL.

##### (3) *At Birmingham.*

About 120 English soldiers who had been wounded in and around Mons arrived in Birmingham on September 1st, and were removed to the new university buildings at Bournbrook, where facilities have been provided for dealing with over 1,000 patients. The contingent was the first batch to arrive. Though terribly maimed, and looking broken and tired, the men were cheerful. About twenty had to be carried, but the majority of them were able to walk with assistance.

In the course of conversation with a *Daily Telegraph* reporter a number of the men spoke of the terrible character of the fighting. The Germans, one man said, outnumbered us by

# IN THE FIRING LINE

**Heroes of the War  
by Land and Sea**

**By A St. JOHN ADCOCK**







## The Four Days' Battle near Mons 61

100 to one. As we knocked them down, they simply filled up their gaps and came on as before.

One of the Suffolk men stated that very few were injured by shot wounds. Nearly all the mischief was done by shells. The Germans, he said, fired six at a time, and if you missed one you got the others.

One poor fellow, whose head was so smothered in bandages that his features could not be seen, remarked, "We could beat them with bladder-sticks if it were not for the shells, which were appalling. The effect could not be described."

A private of the West Kent Regiment, who was through the Boer War, said there was never anything like the fighting at Mons in South Africa. That was a game of skittles by comparison.

They came at us, he said, in great masses. It was like shooting rabbits, only as fast as you shot one lot down another lot took their place. You couldn't help hitting them. We had plenty of time to take aim, and if we weren't reaching the Bisley standard all the time, we must have done a mighty lot of execution. As to their rifle fire, they couldn't hit a haystack.

A sergeant gunner of the Royal Field Artillery, who was wounded at Tournai, owing to

an injury to his jaw was unable to speak, but he wrote on a pad :

I was on a flank with my gun and fired about sixty rounds in forty minutes. We wanted support and could not get it. It was about 500 English trying to save a flank attack, against, honestly, I should say, 10,000. As fast as you shot them down more came. But for their aeroplanes they would be useless. I was firing for one hour at from 1,500 yards down to 700 yards, so you can tell what it was like.

#### IN HOSPITAL.

##### (4) *At London.*

All the heroism that has been displayed by British troops in the present war will never be known. A few individual cases may chance to be heard of. Others will be known only to the Recording Angel. Two instances of extraordinary bravery are mentioned by a couple of wounded soldiers lying in the London Hospital in the course of a narrative of their own adventures.

One of them, a splendid fellow of the Royal West Kent Regiment, told a *Daily Telegraph* reporter :

We were in a scrubby position just outside Mons from Saturday afternoon till Monday

## 1 The Four Days' Battle near Mons 63

morning. After four hours each of our six big guns was put out of action. Either the gunners were killed or wounded, or the guns themselves damaged. For the rest of the time—that is, until Monday morning, when we retired—we had to stick the German fire without being able to retaliate. It was bad enough to stand this incessant banging away, but it made it worse not to be able to reply.

All day Sunday and all Sunday night the Germans continued to shrapnel us. At night it was just hellish. We had constructed some entrenchments, but it didn't afford much cover and our losses were very heavy. On Monday we received the order to retire to the south of the town, and some hours later, when the roll-call was called, it was found that we had 300 dead alone, including four officers.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. Me and some of my pals began to dance. We were just dancing for joy at having escaped with our skins, and to forget the things we'd seen a bit, when bang! and there came a shell from the blue, which burst and got, I should think, quite twenty of us.

That's how some of us got wounded, as we thought we had escaped. Then another half-dozen of us got wounded this way. Some of our boys went down a street near by, and found a basin and some water, and were washing their

hands and faces when another shell burst above them and laid most of them out.

What happened to us happened to the Gloucesters. Their guns, too, were put out of action, and, like us, they had to stand the shell-fire for hours and hours before they were told to retire. What we would have done without our second in command I don't know.

During the Sunday firing he got hit in the head. He had two wounds through the cap in the front and one or two behind, and lost a lot of blood. Two of our fellows helped to bind up his head, and offered to carry him back, but he said, "It isn't so bad. I'll be all right soon." Despite his wounds and loss of blood, he carried on until we retired on Monday. Then, I think, they took him off to hospital.

A stalwart chap of the Cheshires here broke in.

Our Cheshire chaps were also badly cut up. Apart from the wounded, several men got concussion of the brain by the mere explosions. It was awful! Under cover of their murderous artillery fire, the German infantry advanced to within three and five hundred yards of our position. With that we were given the order to fix bayonets, and stood up for the charge. That did it for the German infantry! They turned tail and ran for their lives.

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Our captain cried out, "Now you've got 'em, men!" But we hadn't. Their artillery begins with that to fire more hellish than ever, and before you could almost think what to do a fresh lots of the "sausages" came along, and we had to beat a retreat.

During the retreat one of our sergeants was wounded and fell. With that our captain runs back and tries to lift him. As he was doing so he was struck in the foot, and fell over. We thought he was done for, but he scrambles up and drags the sergeant along until a couple of us chaps goes out to help 'em in. You should have seen his foot when he took his boot off—I mean the captain. It wasn't half smashed.

How a number of British troops made a dash in the night to save some women and children from the Germans was told by Lance-corporal Tanner, of the 2nd Oxfordshire and Bucks Light Infantry. On the Sunday the regiment arrived at Mons.

We took up our position in the trenches, he said, and fought for some time. In the evening the order came to retire, and we marched back to Conde, with the intention of billeting for the night and having a rest. Suddenly, about midnight, we were ordered out, and set off to march to the village of Douai, some miles



away, as news had reached us that the Germans were slaughtering the natives there.

It was a thrilling march in the darkness, across the unfamiliar country. We were liable to be attacked at any moment, of course, but everyone was keen on saving the women and children, and hurried on. We kept the sharpest lookout on all sides, but saw nothing of the enemy.

When we reached Douai a number of the inhabitants rushed out to meet us. They were overjoyed to see us, and speedily told what the Germans had done. They had killed a number of women and children. With fixed bayonets we advanced into the village, and we saw signs all around us of the cruelty of the enemy.

Private R. Wills, of the Highland Light Infantry, who also took part in the march to the village, here continued the story.

We found that most of the Germans had not waited for our arrival, and there were only a few left in the place. However, we made sure that none remained there.

We started a house-to-house search. Our men went into all the houses, and every now and then they found one or two of the enemy hiding in a corner or upstairs. Many of them surrendered at once, others did not.



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When we had cleared the village, some of us lay down on the pavements, and snatched an hour's sleep. At 3.30 we marched away again, having rid the place of the enemy, and, getting back to camp, were glad to turn in.

A sergeant of the Royal Field Artillery, who was wounded by shrapnel just outside Mons village, said that the German artillery-fire was good; once the enemy's gunners got the range they did well.

Their shooting was every bit as good as ours, and although our battery made excellent practice, three of our men were killed, and twenty out of thirty-six were wounded. I lay on the field all night, and was rescued the next morning. Fortunately, the Germans did not come and find me during those long hours of loneliness.

In such tales of these men in hospital, and in the letters they have written home, there is a common agreement that the German rifle shooting is beneath contempt—"they shoot from the hip and don't seem to aim at anything in particular;" but their artillery practice is spoken of with respect and admiration. The German artillery is very good, writes Private Geradine, of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, but their aeroplanes help them a lot. It is a pretty sight

to see the shells burst in the night, he adds—it's like Guy Fawkes Day!

I like too, such robust cheerfulness and gay good-humour in face of the horrors of death as sounds through the letter of Sapper Bradley :

I have never seen our lads so cheery as they are under great trials. You couldn't help being proud of them if you saw them lying in the trenches cracking jokes or smoking while they take pot shots at the Germans. . . . We have very little spare time now, but what we have we pass by smoking concerts, sing-songs, and story-telling. Sometimes we have football for a change, with a German helmet for a ball, and to pass the time in the trenches have invented the game of guessing where the next German shell will drop. Sometimes we have bets on it, and the man who guesses correctly the greatest number of times takes the stakes.

And surely no less do I like the equally courageous but more sombre outlook of the Scottish Private who complained of the famous retreat from Mons, It was "Retire! retire! retire!" when our chaps were longing to be at them. But they didn't swear about it, because being out there and seeing what we saw makes you feel religious.

I like that wonderful diary kept by a driver of

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the 4th Ammunition Column, 3rd section, R.F.A. It was sent over from Paris by Mr. Harold Ashton, *The Daily News* correspondent, and is as naively and minutely realistic as if it were a page out of Defoe. The driver's interests are naturally centred in his horses, they hold the first place in his regard, the excitements of the war coming second. He records how he went from Hendon to Southampton on the 21st August :

Got horses on board all right, though the friskiest of them kicked a lot. Got to Havre safe. Food good—rabbit and potatoes and plenty of beer, not our English sort, but the colour of cyder. Us four enjoyed ourselves with the family, had a good time, and left ten o'clock next day well filled up. Our objective was Compiègne. We got through all right, watering our horses on the way from pumps and taps at private houses. The people were awful kind, giving us quantities of pears, and filling our water-bottles with beer. That was all right. Our welcome was splendid everywhere. At Compiègne we got into touch with the Germans. Very hot work. We marched from Compiègne about eleven o'clock on the 31st, which was Sunday. The way was hard. Terrible steep hills which knocked out our older and weaker horses. Collick broke out among them, too, and that was bad. We lost a good many . . . Slept until

5 a.m. and then marched on again, still retreating. Hot as ——. Nothing to eat or drink. Plenty of tea, but nothing to boil it with. At last we got some dry biscuits and some tins of marmalade. Bill —, whose teeth were bad, went near mad with toothache after the jam. . . . No dead horses, thank God, to-day. I hope we have checked that — collick, but my horse fell into a ditch going through the wood and could not get out for over an hour. I couldn't go for help, because the Germans had got the range of the place and their shells were ripping overhead like blazes. Poor old Dick (the horse), he was that fagged out by the long march. At last I got him out and went on, and by luck managed to pick up my pals. . . . The Germans were lambing in at us with their artillery, and poor old Dick got blowed up. I thank God I wasn't on him just then. Sept. 2.—More fighting and worser than ever. I don't believe we shall ever get to Paris. . . . Now we come to Montagny, and fighting all the time. Rabbits and apples to eat gallore, but still no money, and no good if we had because we carnt spend it. Sept. 3.—We progressed this day four miles in twelve hours. Took the wrong road, and had to crawl about the woods on our stummoks like snakes to dodge the German snipers. We had one rifle between four of us, and took it in turns to have goes. We shot one blighter and took another

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prisoner. They was both half starved and covered with soars. Then the rifle jammed, and we had nothing to defend ourselves with. At last we found the main body again. They wanted more horses, and we were just bringing them up and putting them to the guns when a German areyplane came over us and flue round pretty low. The troops tried to fetch him down, and some bullets went through the wings, but then he got too high. He dropped a bomb in the middle of us, but it exploded very weak and nobody was hurt. Next day we started on a night march, and got to Lagny Thorigny, and camped outside the town, where the people fed us on rabbits again. I said I was sick of rabbits, and me and Bill walked acrost to a farmhouse and borrowed three chickens, which we cooked. It was fine. . . . Outside Lagny there was more fierce fighting—20 miles of it—and the Germans were shot down like birds. Sept. 3 (continued).—Firing is still going on, but it is not so fierce, though scouts have come in and told us there are 10,000 Germans round us this day. To-night I got two ounces of Navy Cut. It was prime. Sept. 8.—We are marching on further away from Paris. We shall never get there, I guess. Sept. 12.—In the village of Crecy. Plenty of food and houses to sleep into. Here we have got to stay until further orders. Collick still very bad.

The calm matter-of-fact air with which he

encounters whatever comes to him, the keen joy he takes in small pleasures by the way; his philosophic acceptance of the fate of "poor old Dick"—the whole thing is so unruffled, so self-possessed, so Pepysian in its egoism and so artlessly humorous that one hopes this phlegmatic driver will keep a full diary of his campaignings, and that Mr. Ashton will secure and publish it.



### III

#### THE DESTRUCTION OF LOUVAIN

*“Such food a tyrant’s appetite demands.”*

WORDSWORTH.

THE stupid arrogance of the German military caste has always made them ridiculous in the eyes of decent human creatures ; it was surprising, amusing, and yet saddening, too, to see an intelligent people strutting and playing such war-paint-and-feathers tricks before high heaven, but it appears that the primitive impulses that survive in their character are stronger and go deeper than we had suspected. There are brave and chivalrous spirits among Germany’s officers and men ; that goes without saying ; but the savage and senseless barbarities that have marked her conduct of the present war will make her name a byword for infamy as long as it is remembered. There seems no doubt—the charges are too many and too widely spread—that her troops have murdered the wounded, have shot down women and children, have even

used them as shields, driving them in front of their firing line ; they have ruthlessly murdered unarmed civilians, and have blasted farmsteads and villages into ashes on the flimsiest provocation ; sometimes, so far as one can learn, without waiting for any provocation whatever. Even if their hands were clean of that innocent blood, the wanton, insensate destruction of such a city as Louvain is sufficient of itself to put them outside the pale of civilised societies. No doubt they were smarting with humiliation that they had been so long delayed breaking through the stubborn opposition of the Belgians at Liège ; but Louvain was an unfortified city and they were allowed to take peaceable possession of it. Nevertheless, on August 25th whilst the fighting round Mons was at its hottest and Russia was sweeping farther and farther over the frontiers of East Prussia, in some sort of burst of vengeful frenzy they laid one of the loveliest old cities of the world in ruins, burnt or shattered most of its priceless art treasures, and left its citizens homeless. Of course they have been busy ever since trying to cover up their shame with excuses, but such a wanton crime is too great and too glaringly obvious to be hidden or excused.

Four impressively realistic descriptions of what happened when the Germans thus went mad in

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Louvain have been published in the *Daily Telegraph* :

I. From a *Daily Telegraph* Folkestone Correspondent, Saturday, August 29th :

Among the refugees arriving here to-day were women and children from Louvain and soldiers from Liège, all narrating thrilling adventures. Some of the refugees had obviously hurriedly deserted their homes, wrapping a few of their belongings in sheets of newspaper.

One woman from Louvain tore down the curtains from her windows, wrapped them round some wearing apparel, and ran from her house with her two children. In the street she became involved in a stampede of men, women, and children tearing away from the burning town, whither she knew not. This woman's story was so disjointed, so interspersed with hysterical sobs and exclamations, that it is impossible to make a full and coherent narrative of it. Periodically she clasped her children, gazed round upon the English faces, and thanked God and bemoaned her fate alternately.

Although suffering from extreme nervous excitement, another woman had intervals of comparative calmness during which she described her experiences as follows :

" Ah ! m'sieu," she exclaimed, " I will tell

you, yes, of the burning of Louvain. We had pulled down some of the buildings so that the Germans should not mount guns on them when they came. I believe that was the reason. We were in a state of terror because we had heard of the cruelties of the Germans."

Every time the poor woman referred to the Germans she paused to utter maledictions upon them.

"Well," she proceeded, "they came, and all we had heard about them was not so bad as we experienced. In the streets people were cruelly butchered, and then on all sides flames began to rise. We were prepared for what we had regarded as the worst, but never had we anticipated that they would burn us in our homes.

"People rushed about frantic to save their property. Pictures of relatives were snatched from the walls, clothing was seized, and the people were demented.

"What was the excuse given? Well, they said our people had shot at them, but that was absolutely untrue. The real reason was the pulling down of the buildings. My house was burning when I left it with my three children, and here I am with them safe in England, beautiful England. But what we have suffered! We were part of a crowd which left the burning town, and kept walking without knowing where we were going. Miles and miles we trudged. I am told we walked

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over seventy miles before we came to a railway. I never regarded a railway as I did then. I wanted to bow down and kiss the rails. I fell exhausted, having carried my children in turn. Footsore, broken-hearted, after the first joy of sighting the railway, I felt my head whirling, and I wondered whether it was all worth while. Then I thought of my deliverance, and thanked God.

“What did Louvain look like? Like what it was, a mass of flame devouring our homes, our property—to some, perhaps, our relatives. It was pitiful to behold. Most of us women were deprived of our husbands. They had either fallen or were fighting for their country. In the town everybody who offered any opposition was killed, and everyone found to be armed in any way was shot. Wives saw their husbands shot in the streets.

“I saw the burgomaster shot, and I saw another man dragged roughly away from his weeping wife and children and shot through the head. Well, we got a train and reached Boulogne, and now for the first time we feel really safe.”

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2. From a *Daily Telegraph* Rotterdam correspondent, Sunday, August 30th.



The following account of the appalling and ruthless sacking of Louvain by the Germans is given by a representative of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, who himself witnessed the outrages :

I arrived at Louvain on Tuesday afternoon, and, accompanied by a German officer, made my way through the town. Near the station were the Commander and Staff and many of the military, for a food and ammunition train had just arrived. Suddenly shots rang out from houses in the neighbourhood of the station. In a moment the shooting was taken up from houses all over the town.

From the window of the third floor of an hotel opposite the station a machine gun opened fire. It was impossible to know which of the civilians had taken part in the shooting, and from which houses they had fired. Therefore the soldiers went into all the houses, and immediately there followed the most terrible scenes of street fighting. Every single civilian found with weapons, or suspected of firing, was put to death on the spot. The innocent suffered with the guilty.

There was no time for exhaustive inquiry. Old men, sick people, women were shot. In the meanwhile, part of the town was shelled by artillery. Many buildings were set on fire by the



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shells. On others petrol was poured and a match applied. The German officer advised me to go away, as several houses being still intact more firing was expected.

Under a strong escort two groups of men and women arrived, each a hundred strong. They were hostages. They were stood in rows by the station, and every time a soldier was shot in the town ten of these pitiful civilians were slaughtered. There was no mercy. Tears and pleadings were in vain. The good suffered with the bad. At night the scene was terrible, burning buildings shedding a lurid glow over this town, which was running with tears of blood.

This was no time for sleep. The sight of this terrible awfulness drove away all thoughts and desire for rest. Towards dawn the soldiers took possession of all buildings which had not been destroyed.

With the rising of the sun I walked on the boulevards, and saw them strewn with bodies, many of them being of old people and priests. Leaving Louvain for Tirlemont one passed continuously through utterly devastated country.

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A Dutchman who escaped from Louvain says that when the German artillery began to demolish the houses and the German soldiers

began looting everything he and his little son hid in a cellar beneath a pile of pneumatic tyres. One woman took refuge in a pit, in which water was up to her waist. Such was the terrible plight of the civilians in Louvain. Peeping out they saw that neighbours had been driven to the roof of a burning building, where they perished.

While still concealed in the cellar the Dutchman and his son discovered to their horror that the house above them was in flames. The situation was terrible, as the people who dared to leave their houses were shot like rabbits leaving burrows. They heard floor by floor, and then the roof, crash down above them. The situation was desperate. It was impossible to remain in the cellar. Driven out by dire necessity, they fled. They were immediately stopped by military rifles at the "present."

"Do not fire, I am German," said the Dutchman in German, seized with a sudden inspiration. This secured his safe conduct to the railway station. The journey through the town was, said this refugee, "like walking through hell." From burning houses he heard agonised cries of those perishing in the conflagrations. While he was waiting at the station fifty people arrived there, driven by troops, who asserted that they found them hiding in houses from which



*Drawn by E. Matania.*

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GERMAN SOLDIERS DRIVING THE INHABITANTS OF LOUVAIN BEFORE THEM  
DURING THE SACKING OF THE TOWN.



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shots had been fired. These people swore by all they held sacred they were innocent, but notwithstanding all were shot. The Dutchman is of opinion that the first firing was not by civilians, but by the German outpost on German soldiers retreating to Louvain from Malines.

*Note :—*There is no confirmation whatever of the Dutch correspondent's assertion with regard to the firing on the German troops. On the contrary it has been expressly said by the Belgian Government that the Germans fired on their own men by mistake.

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3. From a *Daily Telegraph* Rotterdam Correspondent, Monday, August 31st :

“ With a crowd of other men, I was marched out of Louvain, and at nightfall ordered into a church,” said an escaped Dutchman to a *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* representative. “ All was dark, till suddenly, through the windows, I saw the lurid glow of the neighbouring burning houses. I heard the agonised cries of people tortured by the flames. Six priests moved among us, giving absolution. Next morning the priests were shot—why, I know not. We were released, and allowed to go to Malines. We were compelled to

walk with our hands in the air for fear of arms being concealed."

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A Dutchman who has arrived at Breda from Louvain gives the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* the following account of the massacre :

Several German soldiers were billeted on us, and just as we were sitting down to the midday meal on August 25th the alarm was sounded and the soldiers rushed out. Immediately firing started, and, knowing the terrible consequences of civilians appearing in the streets at such times, we sought refuge in the cellar. Next morning we attempted to reach the railway station. We were arrested.

My wife was taken away from me, and the Mayor, the Principal of the University, and I, with other men, were taken to a goods shed and our hands bound. I saw 300 men and boys marched to the corner of the Boulevard van Tienen, and every one was massacred. The heads of police were shot. We were then marched towards Herent, and on the way the soldiers thought the enemy was approaching, and ordered us to kneel down. Then they took cover behind us. Only after many such hardships were we permitted to return to Louvain and escape by train.



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4. From a *Daily Telegraph* Rotterdam correspondent, Wednesday, September 2nd:

A Dutchman who has just arrived at Breda from Louvain gives the following vivid description of his terrible experiences in Louvain, where he was present at the burning of the city :

We Dutchmen in Louvain at first had nothing to fear from the German soldiers, but all the houses abandoned by their owners were ransacked, notwithstanding the warnings from the military authorities forbidding the troops to pillage. In Louvain, as in all other towns they have occupied, the Germans imprisoned as hostages of war the Burgomaster, two magistrates, and a number of influential citizens.

Before the Germans entered the town the Civic Guard had been disarmed, and all weapons in the possession of the population had to be given up. Even toy guns and toy pistols and precious collections of old weapons, bows and arrows, and other antique arms useless for any kind of modern warfare had to be surrendered, and all these things—sometimes of great personal value to the owner—have since been destroyed by the Germans. The value of one single private collection has been estimated at about £1,000. From the pulpits the priests urged the people to keep calm, as that was the only way to prevent harm being done to them.

A few days after the entry of the German troops, the military authorities agreed to cease quartering their men in private houses, in return for a payment of 100,000 francs (£4,000) per day. On some houses between forty and fifty men had been billeted. After the first payment of the voluntary contribution the soldiers camped in the open or in the public buildings. The beautiful rooms in the Town Hall, where the civil marriages take place, were used as a stable for cavalry horses.

At first everything the soldiers bought was paid for in cash or promissory notes, but later this was altered. Soldiers came and asked for change, and when this was handed to them they tendered in return for the hard cash a piece of paper—a kind of receipt.

On Sunday, the 23rd, I and some other influential people in the town were roused from our beds. We were informed that an order had been given that 250 mattresses, 200 lbs. of coffee, 250 loaves of bread, and 500 eggs, must be on the market-place within an hour. On turning out we found the Burgomaster standing on the market-place, and crowds of citizens, half naked, or in their night attire, carrying everything they could lay hands on to the market, that no harm might befall their Burgomaster. After this had been done the German officer in command told

us that his orders had been misinterpreted, and that he only wanted the mattresses.

On Tuesday, the 25th, many troops left the town. We had a few soldiers in our house. At six o'clock, when everything was ready for dinner, alarm signals sounded, and the soldiers rushed through the streets, shots whistled through the air, cries and groans arose on all sides ; but we did not dare leave our house, and took refuge in the cellar, where we stayed through long and fearful hours. Our shelter was lighted up by the reflection from the burning houses. The firing continued unceasingly, and we feared that at any moment our houses would be burnt over our heads. At break of day I crawled from the cellar to the street door, and saw nothing but a raging sea of fire.

At nine o'clock the shooting diminished, and we resolved to make a dash to the station. Abandoning our home and all our goods except what we could carry, and taking all the money we had, we rushed out. What we saw on our way to the station is hardly describable, everything was burning, the streets were covered with bodies shot dead and half-burnt. Everywhere proclamations had been posted, summoning every man to assist in quenching the flames, and the women and children to stay inside the houses. The station was crowded with fugitives, and I was just trying to show an officer my legitimation

papers when the soldiers separated me from my wife and children.

All protests were useless, and a lot of us were marched off to a big shed in the goods yard, from where we could see the finest buildings of the city, the most beautiful historical monuments, being burned down.

Shortly afterwards German soldiers drove before them 300 men and lads to the corner of the Boulevard van Tienen and the Maria Theresia Street, opposite the Café Vermalen. There they were shot. The sight filled us with horror. The Burgomaster, two magistrates, the Rector of the University, and all police officials had been shot already.

With our hands bound behind our backs we were then marched off by the soldiers, still without having seen our wives or children. We went through the Juste de Litsh Street, along the Diester Boulevard, across the Vaart and up the hill.

From the Mont Cesar we had a full view of the burning town, St. Peter in flames, while the troops incessantly sent shot after shot into the unfortunate town. We came through the village of Herent—one single heap of ruins—where another troop of prisoners, including half-a-dozen priests, joined us. Suddenly, about ten o'clock, evidently as the result of some false alarm, we were ordered to kneel down, and the soldiers stood

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behind us with their rifles ready to fire, using us as a shield. But fortunately for us nothing happened.

After a delay of half-an-hour, our march was continued. No conversation was allowed, and the soldiers continually maltreated us. One soldier struck me with all his might with the heavy butt-end of his rifle. I could hardly walk any further, but I had to. We were choked with thirst, but the Germans wasted their drinking water without offering us a drop.

At seven o'clock we arrived at Camperhout, en route for Malines. We saw many half-burnt dead bodies—men, women, and children. Frightened to death and half-starved, we were locked up in the church, and there later joined by another troop of prisoners from the surrounding villages.

At ten o'clock the church was lighted up by burning houses. Again shots whistled through the air, followed by cries and groans.

At five o'clock next morning, all the priests were taken out by the soldiers and shot, together with eight Belgian soldiers, six cyclists, and two gamekeepers. Then the officer told us that we could go back to Louvain. This we did, but only to be recaptured by other soldiers, who brought us back to Camperhout. From there we were marched to Malines, not by the high road, but along the river. Some of the party fell into



the water, but all were rescued. After thirty-six hours of ceaseless excitement and danger we arrived at Malines, where we were able to buy some food, and from there I escaped to Holland. I still do not know where my wife and children are.—*Reuter's Special Service.*

So far as available evidence goes, it seems clear enough that by some misunderstanding the German soldiers fired upon each other in the town, and then made the unhappy townsfolk pay the price of their tragic blundering. There are hopes that the beautiful old Hotel de Ville escaped the general holocaust; otherwise Louvain and its ancient glories of art and architecture are things of the past.

“Louvain is no longer anything but a heap of cinders. . . . In the name of Europe, of which you have till now been one of the most illustrious champions,” writes the well-known French novelist, Romain Roland, in an open letter addressed to the German dramatist, Gerhart Hauptmann, “in the name of civilisation, for which the greatest of men have been fighting for centuries—in the name of the very honour of the Germanic race, I adjure you, Gerhart Hauptmann, and the German intellectual élite, among whom I count so many friends, to protest against this crime. If you do not, it can only mean one of



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two things, either that you approve, or that you are impotent to raise your voice against the Huns who rule you. In the latter case, how can you still pretend that you are fighting for the cause of human liberty and progress? . . . Are you the descendants of Goethe, or of Attila?"

## IV

### THE FIGHT IN THE NORTH SEA

*“ Strong Mother of a Lion line,  
Be proud of these strong sons of thine.”*

TENNYSON.

IN the three weeks that followed on the declaration of war, tidings came to us from time to time of how our ships were chasing and sinking the enemy's cruisers, capturing his merchantmen and keeping the ocean-highways clear for our own and neutral commerce ; but no word reached us from the great British fleet that was keeping watch and ward in the North Sea, waiting sleeplessly for the German Navy that was sheltered behind the impregnable fort of Heligoland to dash out and make its loudly threatened raid upon our coasts. We heard no word of those guardian sailormen, but we slept peacefully in our beds at night, confident in their strength, their courage, their alertness. Then suddenly, on the 28th August, whilst the British and French armies were in the heat of their strategic retreat

## The Fight in the North Sea 91

from Mons, news of our seamen's dashing fight and victory in the North Sea flashed through the land. They had grown weary of waiting, and as the German was too discreet to venture forth to the attack they had slipped into his fastness under cover of the dark and hunted him out. Until it is possible to compile a connected, orderly narrative, the tale of that brilliant engagement is best told in the letters of the men who had part in it :

*Letter 22.—From Albert Roper, first-class petty officer of H.M. cruiser "Talbot," to his brother at Leeds :*

I cannot give you any news about our movements. It is against the rules to do so, and it's a jolly good job, too, for if it was not so, things would leak out, and that is just what we do not want. We are waiting patiently for Willie's fleet to come out to enable our chaps to have a little practice. We try to make ourselves as happy as we can in the shape of a sing-song occasionally. These evenings are well appreciated.

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*Letter 23.—From Seaman Wilson, of the "Bacchante," to his wife at Hunslet :*

You will have read of our victory in the

North Sea. It was fine. Our ship brought the dead and wounded and the prisoners back. A grim job it was, too. I only wish the whole German fleet would come out. We may get a chance of coming home soon. Their firing is rotten, whilst our men behind the guns are perfect. They get a hit every time.

The bounders won't come out. That was the reason our ships had to try and drive them out. You see the place is all mined, and if a ship runs into one of these mines it means destruction.

The commander of the *Liberty*, a torpedo boat destroyer, asked his ship's company if they would volunteer to go up Kiel Harbour with him, and every man said "Yes," although it looked certain death. Up they went, and got under the forts of Heligoland and let rip at the German cruisers in the harbour. One of the wounded sailors of the *Liberty* told me that the shells fired at them were enough to sink a fleet. Our ship had only one torpedo and one round of ammunition left. So they turned round to come out, when a shrapnel shell struck the *Liberty's* mast, killing the gallant commander and three others. The coxswain, although wounded, brought the ship safely to our fleet that was waiting outside. We pray to God that we may come off victorious, and I am confident we shall, as every man jack in the fleet has the heart of a lion.

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*Letter 24.—From a Welsh gunner on the  
“ Arethusa ” :*

Just a few lines to let you know how the war is going on. I cannot say much, as correspondence is strictly secret and letters are likely to be opened. The Commodore turned over to this ship last Wednesday, and we were in action on Friday at 7.45 a.m. and finished a stiff eight-hours' engagement, our loss being eleven killed and fifteen injured in this ship alone.

We were done after the fight, engines disabled, and had to be towed to Chatham. One man was all that was left at my gun. But still, after all, we saw them off. We blew them to ——. Three fights we had. As soon as we are patched up we shall be off again.

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*Letter 25.—From Gunner John Meekly, of Leeds :*

Been in battle, and, wonder of wonders, haven't scored a scratch. My ship, as you know, is the *Arethusa*—“Saucy *Arethusa*” as history knows her. She was the first there, and the first that shot home. It was her that made them come out, and her that took the most prominent part, as all the ship's company know only too well. Now we are in dry dock.

We had to sacrifice ourselves almost to do what we did do—to get them out of their shells. Not only were submarines and mines a menace, but also the fire from the forts. We got within their range, and our ship suffered the most. We have got a fearless admiral, and at the same time a decent fellow.

I saw an account in the papers when we got in dock, and I was very pleased with it, because another ship had been mistaken for us. The name of our commodore is Tyrwhitt.

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*Letter 26.—From Midshipman Hartley, of H.M. battle-cruiser "Lion," to his parents at Burton-on-Trent :*

At last we have had a taste of gunfire, but it was only a taste. We ran into three light German cruisers. Two of them were sunk, and one managed to make off in a sinking condition and badly on fire forward and aft. Of course, their guns had about the same effect on us as a daisy air-rifle. The funny thing, which you should have seen, was all the stokers grubbing about after the action looking for bits of shell.

The Germans fought awfully well and bravely, but the poor beggars hadn't a dog's chance of



## The Fight in the North Sea 95

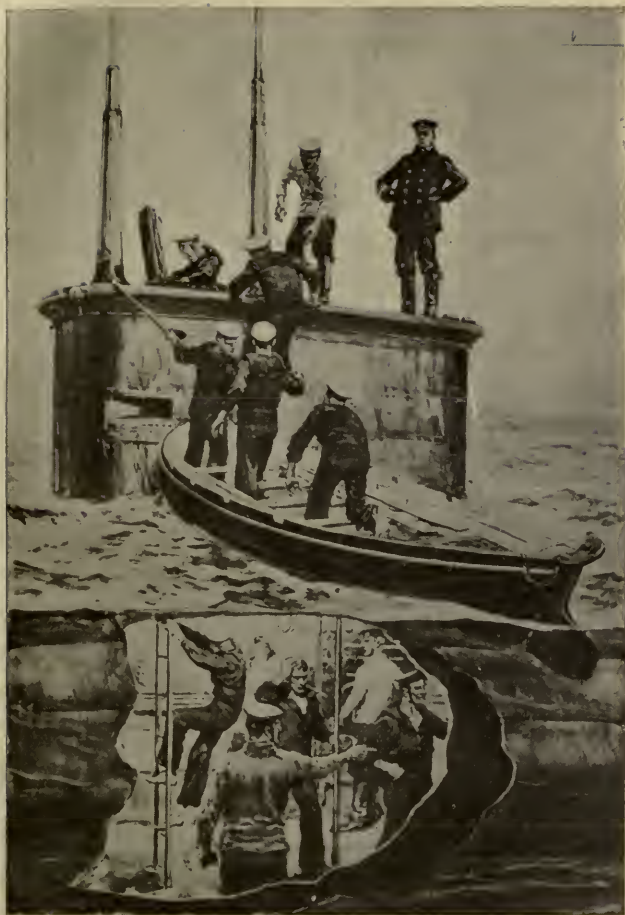
living through it. The *Mainz* was the name of one of those sunk. Two of their destroyers were also sunk.

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*Letter 27.—From a Scottish seaman (Published in "The Scotsman"):*

It was a sight worth seeing. We chased two German destroyers of the "S" class, one of which went on fire, and the other was sunk by eight British destroyers, including the *Defender*. We chased them for about four hours, and one showed great pluck as the crew refused to haul down the flag, and she sank with the German flag flying. When she sank, and even before it, the sailors were swimming towards the British ships, shouting in broken English that they had surrendered, and appealing for help. It was a terrible sight to see the wounded in the water, and we assisted in throwing out lifebelts and ropes to them, while the whaler and a skiff were also lowered, together with small boats from the other British vessels. While engaged in picking up the wounded and other survivors, we were fired on by a big four-funnelled German cruiser, so that we had to leave our two boats. We watched the cruiser firing seven or eight 11-inch guns, which made us keep going well ahead to keep out of the way.

A piece of shell struck one of the gun's crew on the head, and dropped at my feet, and we had to keep dodging the shells round the bridge. A light cruiser at last came to the rescue, for the destroyer's guns were no use against those of the Germans'. Our cruiser sank the German cruiser, and a good many of the enemy's boats escaped. About 12 o'clock on Saturday one of the latest submarines signalled that she had saved the boat's crew (9 men and 1 officer) while following the big cruiser to torpedo her. It was believed these fellows had been lost, and their mates on board never dreamt of seeing them again. Some German survivors were put aboard a destroyer, and they were cheered by the British tars who were anxious to hear the news from them. A German stoker said they did not want to fight England, and it was too much Germany fighting so many countries. It was terrible to hear the cries of the wounded in the water, and we did not get a chance to pick them up. The men on the sinking destroyer stuck to their guns to the last, and they were firing at their own men who dived for our ships. Some had lifebelts on, and the officers tried to frighten them by saying the British would put them in front of their guns. We had only two hurt.



*Drawn by Philip Dadd, from a sketch  
by G. H. Davis.*

*Copyright of The Sphere.*

RESCUED BY SUBMARINE. A STRANGE INCIDENT DURING THE NAVAL  
ACTION OFF HELIGOLAND.



## The Fight in the North Sea 97

*Letter 28.—From a gun-room officer on H.M. battle-cruiser “Invincible,” to his parents at Hove :*

The particular ship we were engaged with was in a pitiful plight when we had finished with her. Her funnels shot away, masts tottering, great gaps of daylight in her sides, smoke and flame belching from her everywhere. She speedily heeled over and sank like a stone, stern first. So far as is known none of her crew was saved. She was game to the last, let it be said, her flag flying till she sank, her guns barking till they could bark no more. Although we suffered no loss we had some very narrow escapes. Three torpedoes were observed to pass us, one, it is said, within a few feet. Four-inch shells, too, fell short, or were ahead of us. The sea was alive with the enemy's submarines, which, however, luckily did no damage. They should not be under-rated, these Germans. They've got “guts.” That cruiser did not think apparently of surrender.

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*Letter 29.—From a Bluejacket in the North Sea,  
to his friends at Jarrow :*

On August 24th we made a dash for the German coast and were lucky enough to come across two German cruisers. Then the fun started. We pursued one, and when I tell you we can do thirty knots, you can imagine what chance she had of getting away. She was a heavier boat than us, and the engagement lasted four hours. At the end of that time she was a terrible sight. She was on fire from stem to stern ; the Germans were jumping overboard, and at the finish only seventeen out of 400 were saved. It is a fact that the Germans only stayed at their guns under the orders of their officers, who stood over them with revolvers. Three dozen of their bodies, which were picked up, bore marks of revolver shots. Five days every week for the last four weeks we have swept the North Sea, and all we discovered were the aforesaid two cruisers and about a dozen trawlers, which we sank. There is no sign of the big German Navy. They are in Kiel Harbour, and if they come out—well, there will be no German Navy left. The only things they are using are mines and submarines. In fact, the so-called German Navy is a “ wash-out.”



## The Fight in the North Sea 99

We have been within ten miles of their base and they will not come out.

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*Letter 30.—From Seaman-Gunner Brown, to his  
parents at Newport, Isle of Wight :*

We and another ship in our squadron came across two German cruisers. We outed one and started on the second, but battle-cruisers soon finished her off. Another then appeared, and after we had plunked two broadsides into her she slid off in flames. Every man did his bit, and there was a continuous stream of jokes. We pencilled on the projectiles. "Love from England," "One for the Kaiser," and other such messages.

The sight of sinking German ships was gloriously terrible ; funnels and masts lying about in all directions, and amidships a huge furnace, the burning steel looking like a big ball of sulphur. There was not the slightest sign of fear, from the youngest to the oldest man aboard.

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*Letter 31.—From a man in a warship's engine-room :*

We stayed down there keeping the engines going at their top speed in order to cut off the Germans from their fleet. We could hear the awful din and the scampering of the tars on the deck as they rushed about from point to point. We could hear the shells crashing against the side of the ship or shrieking overhead as they passed harmlessly into the water, and we knew that at any moment one might strike us in a vital part, and send us below never to come up again. It is ten times harder on the men whose duty is in the engine-room than for those on deck taking part in the fighting, for they at least have the excitement of the fight, and if the ship is struck they have more than a sporting chance of escape. We have none, and the medals and pats on the back when the fight is won are not for us, who are only common mechanics.

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*Letter 32.—From Seaman Jack Diggett, of West Bromwich, to his brother :*

You will have heard of our little job in the North Sea. We sank five ships and ran a few off.

## The Fight in the North Sea 101

Of course it was only a trial spin. We kicked off last Friday about six in the morning, and we won 5—nil. Not bad, considering we are playing “away.” Their goalkeepers could not hold us, we were so hot. Our forwards shot beautifully, and our defence was sound. We agreed to play extra time if we had not finished, but we had done in time. It must not be thought that we had it all our own way, for they were very brave, and fought until one of our boys fired a shot at the last gun in the *Mainz* and blew the whole gun and crew as well into the sea. One of our officers had both his legs blown off, and still shouted out to give the Germans another. We are all getting ready for the big match of the season now when their battle fleet chooses to come out. One German officer we got out of the water asked, “Are you British?” When our officer replied, “Yes,” he said, “God help us!” They thought we were the French fleet.

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*Letter 33.—From a seaman on H.M.S. “Hearty” :*

The destroyer *Laurel* seems to have suffered the most. She had one funnel carried right away

and the others riddled like a pepper-box. One shell struck her right forward, went through her bulkhead, through one galley door, and out through the other. The cook was in there at the time, but it missed him and cut through the other side of the ship. That cook was born under a lucky star. It's on the bridge and around the guns where they suffered most. On the *Liberty's* bridge, everybody except one was killed ; in fact they say they were never seen since. Poor devils, they must have been carried right overboard. The skipper of the *Laurel* had both his legs shot away.

The scout *Arethusa* came in last. She brought 100 Germans picked up off the cruiser *Mainz*. We didn't see them ; they were landed down at Sheerness. They've got one keepsake off her. They picked up a German officer, but he died, and they buried him at sea. They've got his uniform hanging up. The cooks on the *Arethusa* were not so lucky. Two cooks were in the galley, just having their rum, when a shell killed one and blew the other's arm off. A funny thing, they've got a clock hanging up ; it smashed the glass and one hand, but the blooming thing's still going.

## The Fight in the North Sea 103

*Letter 34.—From a seaman on H.M. destroyer  
“Lurcher,” to a friend at Bradford :*

We had orders to pick up prisoners. As we steamed up dead bodies were floating past the ship. We went up alongside the German cruiser *Mainz* just before she sank, and it was an awful sight. We got 224 prisoners in a most terrible state, and most of them died. It is impossible to describe it all on paper. Our decks were red with blood, and you see we are only a destroyer, so you may tell what a mess we were in.

All the Germans seemed quite happy when we got them on board. The worst job of all was getting them out of the sea. Some of them had legs and arms shot away, battered to pieces. I was in our boat just below when their vessel sank, and there seemed to be many who were helpless on board her. The captain remained behind, having had both legs shot away.

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*Letter 35.—From a Naval Lieutenant to a friend :*

That was all. Remains only little details, only one of which I will tell you. The most

romantic, dramatic, and piquant episode that modern war can ever show. The *Defender*, having sunk an enemy, lowered a whaler to pick up her swimming survivors; before the whaler got back an enemy's cruiser came up and chased the *Defender*, and thus she abandoned her whaler. Imagine their feelings—alone in an open boat without food, 25 miles from the nearest land, and that land the enemy's fortress, with nothing but fog and foes around them. Suddenly a swirl alongside and up, if you please, pops his Britannic Majesty's submarine E 4, opens his conning tower, takes them all on board, shuts up again, dives, and brings them home 250 miles! Is not that magnificent? No novel would dare face the critics with an episode like that in it, except, perhaps, Jules Verne; and all true!

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*Letter 36.—From a seaman on one of the British destroyers:*

We have at last had an innings at the Germans. It was a go. Fully seven hours we fought shot for shot. I had the pleasure of seeing four German ships go down. We never knew but it



## The Fight in the North Sea 105

might be our turn next, as great shells were falling all around us. Several shells went just over our heads, whistling just like a needle on a broken record. Would you believe it, one of our boats had actually stopped to pick up German wounded when the Germans fired on her?

I think all our men took it just as though we were having our annual battle practice—cool, laughing, and cracking jokes, with shell all around them. All the thought was just of shooting it into them—and they got it! I was told they lost 1,500 men. I shall never understand how it was our ship was not hit, for we were within range of their cruisers and the Heligoland forts. We are ready for another smack at them.

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*Letter 37.—From a seaman on H.M.S. "New Zealand" to his uncle in Halifax:*

The torpedo craft had rather a hot time with the enemy in the early morning, but suddenly we appeared out of the mist. To say that they were surprised is to put it mildly, because before they knew where they were we were playing our light cruisers, and the destroyers

worried them like terriers. Then for us to come along and give them the *coup de grace* was absolutely *It*.

Two of their ships, I am convinced, would have been floating to-day, but as our small ships gathered round them to take off their survivors—all their flags were struck—they opened fire, only to be sent to Davy Jones's locker a little quicker than they could shoot. Well, we succeeded in sending some good ships and some unfortunate men to the bottom in something like fourteen minutes. Not a bad score for the cricket season, is it?

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*Letter 38.—From a seaman on board the flagship of the first destroyer squadron, to his friends at Wimbledon :*

We had a very decent splash last week off Heligoland, as doubtless you have read. Our ship was not hit at all, though some shots were pretty near. It was a fine sight to see the *Lion* demolish one cruiser. We could see her (the cruiser's) shots falling short, but still the *Lion* did not fire. For fully ten minutes the cruiser

## The Fight in the North Sea 107

belted away without getting a hit. Then the *Lion*, who was leading the line, hoisted "open fire," turned slowly and majestically round and fired her broadside—once. It was quite sufficient. Up went a cloud of smoke and steam from the target, and when it cleared her aft funnel was at a rakish angle, and a huge rent appeared the length of her side.

After a few more "salvoes" she was rapidly sinking by the stern. Shortly afterwards she half-hauled down her ensign, and as we were steaming up to stand by and rescue her survivors, she hoisted it again and opened fire. It was a dirty trick, but they got their deserts. Once again the *Lion* turned, and this time fired but five shots from her huge turrets. Amidst a shower of splinters, smoke, and fire she disappeared. We steamed over the spot, but although there was plenty of wreckage, not a single living thing was to be seen. This incident only lasted about forty-five minutes, although the whole battle was raging for eight hours.

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*Letter 39.—From leading telegraphist H. Francis, of Croydon :*

We had the first taste of blood on Friday, and I can tell you it was O.T. The battle lasted from 6.30 a.m. till one p.m., going at it hammer and tongs all the time.

We came back with sixty prisoners, one of them being Admiral von Tirpitz's son, who was second-lieutenant in the *Mainz*. We were within twenty yards of her when she went down, and I can tell you it was a grand sight.

Their officers were shooting the men as they jumped overboard, and one chap on the bridge was beckoned to by our commander to come off. But there was "nothing doing." He simply folded his arms, shook his head, and as the ship rolled over he never moved. The captain also went down in her. He had both his legs blown off.

For a quarter of an hour the sea was simply alive with Germans, all singing out most piteously, and, as we pulled them on board, we marvelled how they managed to swim with the wounds they had, some with feet off, some with one or two legs off, some with their arms gone.

The Kaiser has been stuffing his men up that the English cannot shoot. They know differently now. They were greatly surprised

## The Fight in the North Sea 109

when we picked them up and looked after them.

Pleased to say I am enjoying myself, and longing for more.

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*Letter 40.—From Gunner T. White :*

We didn't waste more shots than was necessary on the Germans off Heligoland. One of their destroyers was knocked over first shot. It was one of the cleanest shots you ever saw, and the man who fired it is the proudest man in our ship to-day.

Next time I fancy the Germans will want to make it a rule of the fight that a German ship must be allowed at least ten shots to one of ours before the knock-out is fired. Of course, it's very hard on the rest of us, because it simply means that the gunner who gets first shot does the trick, and we may be in a dozen fights and never get a shot at the enemy once, because there's nothing left to hit.

Since that first engagement, the British Fleet has been waiting alert for the enemy to come

out of hiding and give them a second chance ; and has incidentally been busy sweeping the sea of floating mines and prowling after mine-layers that, disguised as Grimsby trawlers, have succeeded in putting in some deadly work.

An interesting account of the efficiency of this policing of the North Sea was related by two trawler skippers, a week after the fight, to a *Daily Telegraph* Correspondent who remarks that the *modus operandi* necessitates a continuous vigilance, mostly under cover of the darkness, and entails a strain upon the naval officers and men that can only be appreciated by those who witness it.

The first skipper stated that he had just come from Iceland :

At one point up north there was, he said, a solid wall of warships, which made it impossible for any foe to break through undetected. The scrutiny did not end with a mere examination at the point mentioned. After being released our boat was followed by a couple of torpedo destroyers until we reached our destination. In this way we were not only convoyed, but the warships made absolutely certain that we were



## The Fight in the North Sea 111

British trawlers. The experience, being novel to us, was very inspiring.

The other skipper's story was even more interesting. He is in charge of a North Sea boat, and anchored each night near the shore.

We were laid under the land, he said, when about two in the morning a cruiser suddenly appeared alongside of us. All his lights were extinguished, and the quiet way in which he came up and the clever tactics he showed in getting alongside without doing any damage was astonishing.

Talk about cats seeing in the dark, these naval officers are wonderful. When the cruiser reached us all we could see was a huge black object hemming us in. A voice shouted out, "Who are you?" and I answered back, "A British trawler." "What is your name?" he asked, and I replied. "When did you leave?" he next asked. I told him. "What were your orders when you left?" he next asked. I told him and in a flash the commander of the cruiser shouted back, "All right."

It was a fine piece of work, believe me, but there was something even more astonishing. Directly the commander had finished talking

to me another voice from the stern of our vessel sung out, "The name is quite correct, sir." A submarine had crept up behind to verify our name and number, and although all the crew had come on deck to see what was happening, not one of the men aft had seen the submarine appear. The whole episode only occupied a few minutes, and the cruiser, after wishing us good morning and plenty of fishing, disappeared in the darkness. I have seen the British Navy in times of peace, but to see it in war time makes you feel proud of it. No swank, simply good old Nelson's motto all the time.

## V

### FROM MONS TO THE WALLS OF PARIS

*"The Lilies of France and our own Red Rose  
Are twined in a coronal now :  
At War's bloody bridal it glitters and glows  
On Liberty's beautiful brow."*

GERALD MASSEY.

IN his despatch to Lord Kitchener, dated September 7th, Sir John French tells of the four-days' battle at Mons, and traces his masterly, triumphant retreat, in the face of irresistible odds, to Maubeuge, to Cambrai, to Le Cateau, to Landrecies, and so almost to within sight of the walls of Paris. He pays a glowing tribute to the magnificent fighting spirit of the officers and men who carried out these stupendous movements with such complete success, but at present it is to the men themselves you must turn again for detailed information of the horrors and heroisms, the grim and glorious hours that darkened and

lightened through those tumultuous days. "What we did in that three weeks English people at home will never know," writes Private J. Harris, of the Worcestershire Regiment: "We were marching and fighting day and night for three weeks without a break."

*Letter 41.—From Private Smiley, of the Gordon Highlanders, to his brother, Mr. G. A. Smiley, of Chepstow :*

On Sunday, 23rd, at Mons, we rose at four a.m. and marched out 1,100 strong. We took up ground on the extreme flank of the British force. Immediately we started to entrench ourselves, and to the good trench work we did we put down our freedom from casualty. Later in the day a hellish tornado of shell swept over us, and with this introduction to war we received our baptism of fire. We were lining the Mons road, and immediately in our front and to our rear were woods. In the rear wood was stationed a battery of R.F.A. The German artillery is wonderful. The first shot generally found us, and to me it looked as if the ranges had been carefully taken beforehand. However, our own gunners were better, and they hammered and battered the Germans all the day long.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 115

They were at least three to our one, and our artillery could not be in fifty places at once, so we just had to stick it. The German infantry are bad skirmishers and rotten shots, and they were simply mowed down in batches by our chaps. They came in companies of, I should say, 150 men in file five deep, and we simply rained bullets at them the live-long day. At about five p.m. the Germans in the left front of us retired, and we saw no more of them.

The Royal Irish Regiment had had an awful smashing earlier on, as also had the Middlesex, and our company were ordered to go along the road as reinforcements. The one and a half mile seemed a thousand. Stormed at all the way, we kept on, and no one was hit until we came to a white house which stood in a clearing. Immediately the officer passed the gap hell was let loose on us, but we got across safely, and I was the only one wounded, and that was with a ricochet shrapnel bullet in the right knee.

I knew nothing about it until an hour after, when I had it pointed out to me. I dug it out with a knife. We passed dead civilians, some women, and a little boy with his thigh shattered by a bullet. Poor wee fellow. He lay all the time on his face, and some man of the Irish was

looking after him, and trying to make him comfortable. The devils shelled the hospital and killed the wounded, despite a huge Red Cross flag flying over it.

When we got to the Royal Irish Regiment's trenches the scene was terrible. They were having dinner when the Germans opened on them, and their dead and wounded were lying all around. Beyond a go at some German cavalry, the day drew in, and darkness saw us on the retreat. The regiment lost one officer and one man dead, one officer and some men severely wounded.

We kept up this sort of game (fighting by day and retiring by night) until we got to Cambrai, on Tuesday night. I dare not mention that place and close my eyes. God, it was awful. Avalanche followed avalanche of fresh German troops, but the boys stuck to it, and we managed to retire to Ham without any molestation. Cambrai was the biggest battle fought. Out of all the glorious regiment of 1,100 men only five officers and 170 of the men answered the roll-call next day. Thank God, I was one of them.

Of course, there may be a number who got separated from the battalion through various causes, and some wounded who escaped. I hope



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 117

so because of the heavy hearts at home. I saw the South Lancers, and they were terribly cut up, only a remnant left of the regiment.

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*Letter 42.—From Corporal W. Leonard, of the Army Service Corps (a South African War reservist) to his mother at Huddersfield :*

I know that you will all excuse me for not receiving a letter from me this long time, but I hope that you will excuse me. Don't, whatever you do at home, don't worry about me. If I just thought that you won't worry at home I shall be all right. You know, mother, I know more about war this time than I did last, and the conditions also. It's all right when you know the ropes, and my African experiences are serving me in good stead here, so I hope and trust that you at home are not worrying about me ; time enough to worry when there is cause. Well, I hope and trust all are well at home, as it is hell out here. Up to this affair I thought that the Germans were a civilised race of people, but they are nothing but savages ; niggers would not do what they do. Just fancy mounting

maxim guns on ambulance wagons bearing the Red Cross, cutting the right hand off prisoners and turning them loose afterwards minus a hand. By jingo, mother, the boys (our boys) are absolutely all in. We did give the Boers a chance now and again, but these devils we don't give them a cat in hell chance; we're playing the game to the finish. I would not care to write so much, as I had better tell you when I come home. The Boer War was a tame affair. We are moving off again to-night. I don't know where, and we don't care either; it's a do to a finish this time. I hope you got my postcards from Rouen in France, as there was some doubt as to whether they would let them through or not. I will write home as opportunity occurs, and I hope you won't worry about me, because you all know at home that I shall always be where I'm wanted, and my duty every time, so don't worry. Tell anyone who enquires I am O.K., lost a bit of weight perhaps, but not the worse so far, and above all don't believe all you see in the papers, as they know practically nothing, as everything is done under sealed orders, which never leak out. We are not even allowed to say in our letters where we are, as they are opened and read by

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 119

the captain before they leave here, so you can judge for yourselves how things are. And I might say, mother, that we are very busy.

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*Letter 43.—From Corporal Edward Hood, to his father, at Taunton :*

The fighting lately has been hot all round, and the French have had much harder than us in some places, but they're sticking at it manfully, and they deserve to win a victory that will wipe the Germans off the map. The French make a lot of us in camp, and when we pass each other in the field, no matter how busy the Frenchman may be, they give us hearty cheers to encourage us on our way. There's plenty of friendly rivalry between us when there's hard fighting to be done, and when we do get there before the French they don't grudge us our luck. They're good sports right through to the core, and the British soldier asks nothing better from allies in the field.

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*Letter 44.—From Private William Burgess, of the Royal Field Artillery, to his parents at Ilfracombe :*

We left our landing place for the front, on the Tuesday, and got there on Saturday night. The Germans had just reached Liège then, and we got into action on the Sunday morning. The first thing we did was to blow up a bridge to stop the Germans from crossing. Then we came into action behind a lot of houses attached to the main street. We were there about ten minutes, when the houses started to fall around us. The poor people were buried alive. I saw poor children getting knocked down by bursting shells.

The next move was to advance across where there was a Red Cross Hospital. They dropped shells from airships and fired on it until the place was burnt down to the ground. Then they got a big plan on to retire and let the French get behind them. We retired eight miles, but we had to fight until we were forced to move again. We got as far as Le Cateau on Tuesday night. We camped there until two o'clock next morning.

Then we all heard there was a big fight coming off, so we all got together and cleared the field for action. . . . (The letter mentions the

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 121

numbers of men engaged, and states that the Germans were in the proportion of three to one.) . . . We cut them down like rats. We could see them coming on us in heaps, and dropping like hail. The Colonel passed along the line, and said, "Stick it, boys."

I tell you, mother, it was awful to see your own comrades dropping down—some getting their heads blown off, and others their legs and arms. I was fighting with my shirt off. A piece of shell went right through my shirt at the back and never touched me. It stuck into a bag of earth which we put between the wheels to stop bullets.

We were there all busy fighting when an air-ship came right over the line and dropped a bomb, which caused a terrible lot of smoke. Of course, that gave the Germans our range. Then the shells were dropping on us thick. We looked across the line and saw the German guns coming towards us. We turned our two centre guns on them, and sent them yards in the air. I reckon I saw one German go quite twenty yards in the air.

Just after that a shell burst right over our gun. That one got me out of action. I had to get off the field the best way I could. The bullets were going all around me on the way off; you see they got completely around us. I went about two



miles, and met a Red Cross cart. I was taken to St. Quentin's Hospital. We were shelled out of there about two in the morning, and then taken in a train, and taken down to a plain near Rouen.

Next morning we were put in a ship for dear old England.

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*Letter 45.—From a Corporal in the King's Royal Rifles, now at Woolwich Hospital :*

I was in three engagements, Mons, Landrecies, and Cambrai, but the worst of all was Mons. It was on Sunday, the 23rd of August, and I shall never forget the date. They were easily twenty-five to one, and we eventually had to retreat with just over a thousand casualties, but heavens, they must have had a jolly sight more. At Landrecies, where we arrived at 7.30, we thought we were going to have a night's rest, though we were wet through and no change, but we hadn't been there long before they (the Germans) started firing; they seemed to be in every place we went to. The only thing we heard then was, "turn out at once." It was about 10.15 when we turned out, and the Colonel's orders were that we had to take a bridge



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 123

if every man was killed. (I thought that sounded a wee bit healthy.) I had my last drink out of a dirty glass of beer. I says, "good health Billy," and off we went with bayonets fixed.

On our way to the bridge we met the regiment who had tried and failed, bringing back its wounded and killed in scores. (I thought more encouragement for the corps.) I was carrying my pal, the rifle, with my right hand. Well, we got near the bridge and found out from our scouts that there were 10,000 German troops on each side of the bridge and we were 1,300 strong. (More encouragement.) So we lined a long hedge about two yards apart so as to make a long line and harder for them to hit. We lay here till daybreak just before 4 a.m., and we could hear them talking all night about 300 yards away. We could see them quite clearly by this time; so we started to fire and rolled them over by dozens. It wasn't long, though, before the bullets were whizzing past my ears on each side, and I began to get my head lower and lower till I think I should have buried it in the mud if it had got much lower. Their superior numbers began to tell and we had to retire as fast as we could. I couldn't go fast enough with my pack on (it weighs 84 lbs.), so I threw it away as

did hundreds more, and I finished bridge-taking with my old pal only (the rifle).

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*Letter 46.—From Lieutenant O. P. Edgcumbe, of 1st Battalion D.C.L.I., to his father, Sir Robert Edgcumbe, Commandant at Newquay :*

29th August, 1914.

For the last week or ten days we have been fighting hard and are now for one day resting. Altogether, during five days and five nights, I got six hours' sleep, and so am rather weary. However, bullets and a real enemy are a wonderful stimulant, and I feel as fit as anything. Do all of you write as often as possible, and send me some newspapers. It does not matter whether there is any news—the sight of a letter from home is very cheering.

All our men are somewhat fatigued, but are very keen and full of fight. My regiment has had a bad time, and I am dreadfully afraid that they have been badly cut up, although I can as yet get no details. They were caught in a village by Germans in the houses, who had managed to get there by wearing our uniforms.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 125

Never again shall I respect the Germans, or any of them I may meet. They have no code of honour, and there have been several cases of their wearing French and British uniforms, which is, of course, against the Geneva Convention.

The weather is good, for which we are thankful.

Everything is so peaceful now, and it is such a perfect day that were it not for the continuous growl of the guns, which never cease, one would hardly believe one was in the midst of a huge war.

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### *Letter 47.—From Private D. White :*

German airships we seldom see now, though we used to have them every day over our heads. They are finding the French more than a match for them, and they most likely prefer to rely on their ordinary spies, of whom they have thousands. They are found often among the men engaged for transport work, but they are such clumsy bunglers that they give themselves away sooner or later. Some of us who haven't the heart to drown a cat never turn a hair when we see these

scum shot, for they richly deserve what they get and a soldier's death is too good for them.

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*Letter 48.—From Private Spain, of the 4th Guards Brigade (late police-constable at Newry) :*

We have had three engagements with the Germans since I arrived, and I came out quite unhurt. The two first were fought on Sunday and Monday following. You see I cannot give date or place. Secrecy is our motto *re* war and movement of troops for international purposes, etc. Our third engagement was nearly fatal. We arrived at the town of —, very much fatigued, and fully intending to have a good rest. It was a fine town, about as big as Newry, but more compact, with many fine buildings. We were just about five minutes billeted in the various houses, and just stretching our weary legs, when an officer came running in, shouting "The Germans are upon us; outside everyone." We came out, magazine loaded, bayonets fixed, and eager to get a good bayonet fight with them. It appears they do not like it. But we found none. They had not yet arrived.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 127

It was 10 p.m. before they did so. In the meantime the poor people were leaving the town in crowds, with as much goods and chattels as they could carry away, and it was well for them, too. It was a dark night when we formed up in the streets, and the lamps but dimly burned. The noises of rifles and field guns were terrific. We rushed to the heads of the various streets, where our German foe would advance. Our Field Artillery and the Coldstream Guards went out to delay their advance whilst we stripped off our coats and commenced to tear up the square setts, gather carts—in fact, everything that would build a barricade to keep back our numerous German foe, and we did so under perfect showers of shrapnel shell that struck and fell around us, and struck the houses about us, but we were undaunted, and so succeeded. Firing ceased, and we advanced out towards the Coldstream Guards' position. They had given them a good fight, but many of them lay for ever silent upon the ground. The Germans would not advance upon us, so we retired.

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*Letter 49.—From Corporal Sam Moorhouse, of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, to his wife at Birkby :*

Our company were reserves, and came under fire about noon. We were in a ditch—as we thought safe—when “Ping! ping!” came the bullets, and off we shot across the open, under a railway embankment. On the way we passed four artillery horses shot dead with shrapnel. Then we took up a position on a hillside, when round the corner, 700 yards away, came a German maxim gun. They were busy getting it ready for firing on us, and we were firing at them, when our artillery—which was only half a mile away—sent two shots and blew up the gun and all the men. Then we cleared off and marched till twelve midnight. Up again at two and off for what was called a rest camp. Still wet clothes, and filthy; had no boots off for days. Instead of “rest” camp we marched nearly thirty miles, arriving at 8 p.m. Here I had a good meal of jam, cheese, and bread—first bite of bread for days.

Next day we were up before daylight and taking up position. We dug trenches, and were fired on before we had finished. We were at the back—a sort of last firing line. So we lay down





*Drawn by Christopher Clark.*

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**HOW THE ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY FIGHT.**



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 129

in the trench, and waited. Shrapnel and lyddite were flying round us like hail, and our gunners were firing too. Such a noise ! Just like thunder ! Well, we stuck out as long as we could when we got the order to retire. However I came safely away goodness knows.

I picked up my gun and ran up the hill and dropped on one side of the road to rest. Then I had to get across the road, so got up and was half-way across when a shell burst and knocked me flat on my face. It must have fused at the wrong time, as I got only a cut on my thumb from a fragment. Then I got across and dropped in a trench where a fellow was lying dead. I stayed there only a minute, and then ran off over the hill and safe. The bullets were flying in all directions and shells were bursting four at a time. South Africa was nothing compared to this.

I had had no sleep for nights, so decided to go back to a little village we had just passed, where I sat on a doorstep till I fell asleep, and woke up one hour later wet through and chilled to the bone. It was still dark when I got back to where I left our regiment, and they were off. So I trekked away alone, and got on the wrong road.

About nine in the morning I came across some transport, and rode along with stragglers of other regiments to a camp. There were about sixty of us, and we went to a large camp, about 2,000 of us—all lost. There I came across Guy Jessop of Huddersfield, who was also lost, and was glad to meet a pal. We had a walk in the town together, and called in a café. We had some coffee and rum (Guy paid, as I had no money). I played the piano and sang "Mrs. Hullaby." Lucky job they could not understand English, or they would have been shocked.

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*Letter 50.—From Private E. W. Dyas, of the  
11th Hussars, to his parents at Mountain Ash :*

We landed at Havre, and travelled 'up country. We were under fire for about twenty minutes on the first day, and the shells were bursting like rain all around us. We got away with only one horse killed. It was marvellous. We are continually under fire by day and traveling by night. It is awful to hear the artillery booming death night and day. We were fighting day and night for three days. The slaughter was

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 131

terrible. I took a dispatch across the battlefield when the Germans were retiring, and I passed their trenches. The dead were piled up in the trenches about ten deep, and there were trenches seven miles long. It was terrible to see. We are collecting the three cavalry brigades together at the present moment for a massive charge. I am writing this in the saddle. I may get through this again. One bullet penetrated my horse's neck and another one went through the saddle. I have had a sword-thrust through my sleeve. So I am getting on well.

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*Letter 51.—From Lieut. Oswald Anne, of the Royal Artillery, to his father, Major Anne, of Burghwallis Hall:*

Dear Dad.—Just got yours of the 13th inst. Battling yesterday and the day before. I had a pal killed in another battery—five bullets in him. I have just seen the first Sausage-maker prisoner in hands of some infantry. They had the greatest difficulty in stopping the French populace from knifing him. The German shrapnel is very dangerous stuff, having high explosive

in it. It bursts backwards, and so nullifies our frontal shield. No more time or news.

August 29th.

The boom of French guns is now in full swing, and we are standing easy for the moment. Did you get my other letter three days back? Just after I had finished it, we had the alarm, which proved false, but that night Germans marched into the town, thinking we had left it. So they say! A gruff German voice answered a challenge, and 15 rounds rapid fire from rifles and maxims behind the main road barricade, laid out every man. Eight hundred were picked up next morning in this one street.

An R.E. told me on the canal bridge a maxim fired 9,000 rounds and laid out another 1,000. The first Germans arriving in one end of this town were in French uniforms. Luckily, those in the rear were seen and fired on, stampeding the ammunition mules, scattering the "Sausages," who were almost laid out in a few rounds of fire. Lots of "espions" here, male and female. I have hardly seen a German, except prisoners. Poor Soames, of the 20th Hussars, was sparrowed first fight. W. Silvertop (20th Hussars) is hard at it "biffing" Sausages, and a N.C.O.,



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 133

yesterday, who had lost the Regiment, told me 48 hours ago he was well.

"Cigs." all arrived, and saved my life, also load of chocolate. Screaming women rush everywhere during conflicts howling "Trahie," "Perdue," "Sauve qui peut." One of "D" battery, R.H.A., N.C.O., told us they had mowed "Sausage-makers" down for ten minutes in one action as hard as they could load and still they came in masses, till at last the shrieking men ran all ways, not knowing where, leaving heaps of semi-moving remnants on the ground.

Our crowd, having so far escaped untouched, are very lucky. Several Brigades have had the devil's own hail of shot over them. Please send me some newspapers sometimes, as we have not seen one since I left, bar some old French *Petit Parisiens*.

The Scots Greys from York and the 12th Lancers did great work yesterday on hostile cavalry, and about wiped out those opposed to them. The "Guardies" are in great form. Very little sleep nowadays, up at dawn almost always, very often before that hour.

A German regiment, dressed in English uniforms, the other day billeted with an English regiment (at the other end of the town), and

when the latter marched out they were about broken up by maxim fire from the bedroom windows. A German force arrived elsewhere, the Berkshire regiment were on guard, and the former, in French uniforms, called out from the wire entanglements that they waited to interview the C.O. A major went forward who spoke French, and was shot down immediately. This sort of thing is of daily occurrence, and only makes matters worse for the "Sausage-makers" when our infantry get into them.

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*Letter 52.—From a reservist in the Royal Field Artillery (Published in the "Glasgow Herald") :*

I got a nasty hit with a shell on the thick of the leg. The Germans caught us napping on Wednesday, and what slaughter! It was horrible to witness. The Germans came along the village, killing the poor women and children and burning all the houses. Our division could not hold out. We were expecting the French troops to meet us, but they were two days late. Our battery had a lucky escape of being cut up. We entrenched our guns to come into action next

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 135

day, but somehow or other we cleared out, and had only gone ten minutes before the place was blown up.

The officer in charge of my section had his head blown off. I was carried off under heavy fire on a fellow's back, and it is to him I owe my life. It was a long way to hospital, shells bursting all round us. We dropped behind some corn stacks, then on we went again. I had no sooner got bandaged up when a chap came galloping up and said the Germans were in sight. I was the second last man to leave the hospital, and ten minutes later it was blown up. You cannot imagine what things were like. The women and children of England can think themselves lucky, for the poor women here had to walk from village to village, young children in their arms. It touched my heart to see the sight. The Germans did not use rifles, but big guns, against our infantry's rifles. They are most brutal, killing all wounded in a most horrible fashion.

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*Letter 53.—From Trooper S. Cargill:*

The Germans let all hell loose on us in their mad attempt to crush us and so win their way to Paris. They didn't succeed, and they won't succeed. I saw one ghastly affair. A German cavalry division was pursuing our retiring infantry when we were let loose on them. When they saw us coming they turned and fled, at least all but one, who came rushing at us with his lance at the charge. I caught hold of his horse, which was half mad with terror, and my chum was going to run the rider through when he noticed the awful glaze in his eyes and we saw that the poor devil was dead.

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*Letter 54.—From an Irish soldier, to his sister in County Cork:*

I am writing this on a leaf out of a field service pocket-book, as notepaper and envelopes are very scarce, and we are not allowed to send picture postcards of places as they give away where we are. Well, this is a lovely country. The climate suits me very well. Everything grows like mad here. It is rather like Ireland, only

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 137

ten times as rich. All that I have seen yet—and that is a good lot—is far and away better than the best part of the county Limerick. I think it would be a pleasure to farm here.

At the present time I am billeted in a farmhouse. I sleep in their best bed-room—that is when I can go to bed at all—and they give me home-made cider, cognac, and coffee, apples, plums, etc., and lovely home-made cheese for nothing, though they need not supply any food, as the rations are served out by the regiment every day.

'Tis great fun trying to talk French to them and I am picking it up gradually. It is wonderful how words and sentences that I learned at school come back to me now, and I can generally make myself understood all right. It is an awful pity to see this beautiful country spoiled by war, and it is no wonder the people are so eager to fight for it. I don't think there is a single house that has not sent out one or more men to fight with the French Army, and their mothers, sisters, wives, etc., are very proud of it. There are two gone out of this house.

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*Letter 55.—From Private Carwardine, to the father of a comrade-in-arms :*

I am very sorry, but I don't know for sure about your Joe. You see, although he was in the same company as me, he was not in the same section. I only wish he had been. The last I saw of him was when we were in the firing line making trenches for ourselves. He was about 600 yards behind us, smoking, and I waved to him. Then all of a sudden we had to get down in our trenches, for bullets started coming over our heads, and shells dropped around us.

We were fighting twelve hours when I got one in the back from a shell. After that I knew no more until I found myself in hospital, and I asked one of our chaps how our company went on, and he told me there were only seventeen of us left out of 210. I hope Joe is among them. You will get to know in the papers in a bit when they call the roll.

So cheer up and don't be downhearted, for if Joe is killed he has died a soldier of honour on the field. Excuse writing, as I am a bit shaky, and I hope to God Joe is safe, for both your sakes.

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## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 139

*Letter 56.—From Private G. Dunton, of the Royal Engineers, to his family at Coventry :*

I am in hospital, having been sent home from France, wounded in my left hand. I have got one shrapnel bullet right through my hand, and another through my middle finger against the top joint. I was wounded at Cambrai last Wednesday. I have been in four hospitals in France, but had to be removed on account of the Germans firing on the hospitals. I do not think much of them, for if it was not for their artillery they would be wiped out in quick time. No doubt our losses are great, but theirs are far more. The famous cavalry of theirs, the Uhlans, are getting cut up terribly. All that have been captured have said that they are short of food. I must say we have had plenty to eat. I was near Mons a week last Saturday and we were attacked the same day. We have been on the retire ever since last Wednesday, when I got wounded, but we shall soon be advancing, for they will never reach Paris. I am very pleased to see that the Germans are being forced back by the Russians. I hope they will serve Berlin the same as the Germans have done to Belgium. The 9th Brigade was cut up badly ; in fact, my Division was, but more are wounded than killed. There are 1,000 wounded in this

hospital alone, without other hospitals. I must say that I am in good health. My hand is giving me pain, but I do not mind that. I only had four days' fighting, but it was hard work while it lasted. The Germans, although four to one, could not break through our lines, and they must have lost thousands, as our artillery and infantry mowed them down like sheep. Their rifle fire took no effect at all. All our wounds were done by shrapnel. My hand is not healing at all, but I must be patient and give it time. The French and Belgian people were very kind to us and gave us anything we wanted.

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*Letter 57.—From a Manchester soldier, in a French hospital :*

There was a young French girl helping to bandage us up. How she stood it I don't know. There were some awful sights, but she never quailed—just a sweet, sad smile for everyone. If ever anyone deserved a front seat in Heaven, this young angel does. God bless her. She has the prayers and the love of the remnants of our division. All the French people are

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 141

wonderfully generous. They gave us anything and everything. You simply cannot help loving them, especially the children.

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*Letter 58.—From Private A. McGillivray, a Highlander, to his mother :*

Of my company only 10 were unhit. I saw a handful of Irishmen throw themselves in front of a regiment of cavalry who were trying to cut off a battery of horse artillery. It was one of the finest deeds I ever saw. Not one of the poor lads got away alive, but they made the German devils pay in kind, and, anyhow, the artillery got away to account for many more Germans. Every man of us made a vow to avenge the fallen Irishmen, and if the German cavalymen concerned were made the targets of every British rifleman and gunner they had themselves to thank. Later they were fully avenged by their own comrades, who lay in wait for the German cavalymen. The Irish lads went at them with the bayonet when they least expected it, and the Germans were a sorry sight. Some of

them howled for mercy, but I don't think they got it. In war mercy is only for the merciful.

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*Letter 59.—From Private W. Bell, of the 2nd South Lancashire Regiment, to his wife:*

I shall never forget this lot. Men fell dead just like sheep. Our regiment was first in the firing line, and we were simply cut up. Very few escaped, so I think I was very lucky, for I was nearly half-a-mile creeping over nothing but dead men. In the trenches, bullets and shells came down on us like rain. We even had to lift dead men up and get under them for safety.

When we got the order to retire an officer was just giving the order to charge when he was struck dead, and it is a good job we didn't charge, or we would have all been killed. I passed a lot of my chums dead, but I didn't see Fred Atkinson (a friend of the family).

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## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 143

*Letter 60.—From Corporal T. Trainor :*

Have you ever seen a little man fighting a great, big, hulking giant who keeps on forcing the little chap about the place until the giant tires himself out, and then the little one, who has kept his wind, knocks him over? That's how the fighting round here strikes me. We are dancing about round the big German army, but our turn will come.

Last Sunday we had prayers with shells bursting all around us, but the service was finished before it was necessary for us to grapple with the enemy. The only thing objectionable I have seen is the robbing of our dead and wounded by German ghouls. In such cases no quarter is given, and, indeed, is never expected.

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*Letter 61.—From an Artilleryman, to his wife at Sheerness :*

I am the only one left out of my battery ; we were blown to pieces by the enemy on Wednesday at Le Cateau. We have been out here twenty-eight days all told, and have been through the five engagements. I have nothing ; only the



jacket I stand up in—no boots or putties, as I was left for dead. But my horse was shot, and not me. He laid down on me. They had to cut my boots, etc., off to get me from under my horse.

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*Letter 62.—From Lance-Corporal J. Preston, of the 2nd Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers, to his wife at Banbridge :*

I did not get hit at Mons. I got through it all right. We encountered the Germans on Sunday at Mons, and fought on till Monday night. It was on the retreat from Mons that I was caught. They had about one hundred guns playing on us all the time we were retiring. We had a battery of artillery with us. They were all blown to pieces, men and guns and all. It was a most sorrowful sight to see the guns wiped out, and the gunners and men lying around them. The whole plain was strewn with dead and wounded. I hope my eyes will never look on anything so horrid again. Our section brought in six prisoners, all wounded, and they told us we had slain hundreds of them. We captured a German spy ; he was dressed in a Scotsman's uniform, and



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 145

was knocking around our camp, but we were a bit too quick for him. I think the hardest battles are fought ; the German cannot stand it much longer, his food supply is getting done.

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### *Letter 63.—From a Corporal in the Motor Cycle Section of the Royal Engineers :*

Last night the enemy made an attempt to get through to our base in armed motors. Myself and two other motor-cyclists were sent out to look for them. It was a pitch-black night, with a thick fog. One of our men got in touch with them, and was pursued. He made for a bridge which had been mined by the engineers, and that was the end of the Germans. . . . The German artillery is rotten. Last Saturday three batteries bombarded an entrenched British battalion for two hours, and only seven men were killed. The noise was simply deafening, but so little effect had the fire that the men shouted with laughter, and held their caps up on the end of their rifles to give the German gunners a bit of encouragement.

This is really the best summer holiday I have had for a long time.

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*Letter 64.—From Corporal J. Bailey :*

It's very jolly in camp in spite of all the drawbacks of active service, and we have lively times when the Germans aren't hanging around to pay their respects. It's a fine sight to see us on the march, swinging along the roads as happy as schoolboys, and singing all the old songs we can think of. The tunes are sometimes a bit out, but nobody minds so long as we're happy. As we pass through the villages the French come out to cheer us and bring us food and fruit. Cigarettes we get more of than we know what to do with. Some of them are rotten, so we save them for the German prisoners, who would smoke anything they can lay their hands on. Flowers also we get plenty of, and we are having the time of our lives.

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## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 147

*Letter 65.—From a Sergeant in the Royal Field Artillery :*

If the French people were mad about us before we were on trial, they are absolutely crazy over us now when we have sort of justified our existence. In the towns we pass through we are received with so much demonstration that I fancy the French soldiers must be jealous. The people don't seem to have eyes for anybody but us, and they do all they can to make us comfortable. They give us the best they can lay hold of, but that's not much after the Germans have been around collaring all they could. It's the spirit that means so much to us, and even though it was only an odd cup of water they brought us we would be grateful. Most of us are glad to feel that we are fighting for a nation worth fighting for, and after our experience there can be no question of trouble between us and France in the future.

We lost terribly in the retreat from Mons, of which you have heard by now, but artillery always stands to lose in retreats, because we play such a big part in getting the other men away and we quite made up our minds that we would have to pay forfeit then. Without boasting, I can say that it was the way the guns were handled

that made it so easy for our lads to get out of the German trap. There was once or twice when it looked as though it were all up with us, and some of our chaps were fair down in the mouth over it; but I think now they didn't make sufficient allowance for the steadiness of all arms of our service; and, between ourselves, I think they had got the usual notions about the splendid soldiering qualities of the German army. They know better now, and though it's bad to get chesty about that sort of thing, we are all pretty confident that with a sporting chance we stand to win all the time.

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*Letter 66.—From Private J. Toal:*

It's tired we all were when we got through that week of fighting and marching from Mons; but after we'd had a taste of rest for a day or two, by the saints, we were ready for the ugly Germans again, and we've been busy ever since drilling holes in them big enough to let out the bad that's in them. You wouldn't believe the way they have burned and destroyed the holy churches everywhere they went, and there's

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 149

many an Irish lad betwixt here and the frontier has registered a vow that he will not rest content till he's paid off that score against the men who would lay hands on God's altars.

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### *Letter 67.—From Private W. Green :*

We see more Germans than you could count in the day, but they are now very funky about it, and they will never wait for a personal interview with one of our men, especially if he has a lance or a bayonet handy, and naturally you don't go out German-hunting without something of the kind with you, if only just for luck. When they must face us they usually get stuck away somewhere where they are protected by more guns than you ever set eyes on, and likewise crowds of machine guns of the Maxim pattern, mounted on motors. These are not now so troublesome, for they are easy to spot out in the open, and our marksmen quickly pick off the men serving them, so the Germans are getting a bit shy about displaying them. Something we heard the other day has put new life into us; not that we were downhearted before, but what I mean



shows that we are going to have all we wished for very soon, and though we can't tell you more you may be sure that we are going on well.

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*Letter 68.—From Private G. A. Turner, to his father, Mr. J. W. Turner, of Leeds (Published in the "Leeds Mercury") :*

I am still living, though a bit knocked about. I got a birthday present from the Kaiser. I was wounded on the 23rd. So it was a near thing, was it not? I got your letter at a place called Moroilles, in France, about five miles from Landrecies, where our troops have retired.

On Sunday, 23rd, we had rifle inspection at 11 a.m., and were ordered to fall in for bathing parade at 11.30. While we were waiting for another company to return from the river the Germans commenced to shell the town. We fell in about 1.0 p.m., an hour and a half afterwards, to go to the scene of the attack. Shells were bursting in the streets as we went. We crossed a bridge over the canal under artillery fire, and stood doing nothing behind a mill on the bank for some time.



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 151

Then someone cried out that the Germans were advancing along the canal bank, and our company were ordered to go along. We thought we were going to check the Germans, but we found out afterwards that a company of our own regiment were in position further along on the opposite side of the canal, and we were being sent out to reinforce them.

There was no means of crossing the canal at that point, so it was an impossibility. As soon as we started to move we were spotted by the Germans, who opened fire with their guns at about five hundred yards with shrapnel, and the scene that followed beggars description. Several of us were laid full length behind a wooden fence about half an inch thick. The German shells burst about three yards in front of it. It was blown to splinters in about ten minutes. None of us expected to get out alive.

They kept us there about an hour before they gave us the word to retire. I had just turned round to go back when I stopped one. It hits you with an awful thump, and I thought it had caught me at the bottom of the spine, as it numbed my legs for about half an hour.

When I found I could not walk I gave it up. Just after, I got my first view of the Germans.

They were coming out of a wood about 400 yards away all in a heap together, so I thought as I was done for I would get a bit of my own back, and I started pumping a bit of lead into them.

I stuck there for about three-quarters of an hour, and fired all my own ammunition and a lot belonging to two more wounded men who were close to me—about 300 rounds altogether, and as it was such a good target I guess I accounted for a good lot of them.

Then I suddenly discovered I could walk, and so I set off to get back. I had to walk about 150 yards in the open, with shrapnel bursting around me all the way, but somehow or other I got back without catching another. It was more than I expected, I can assure you, and I laughed when I got in the shelter of the mill again.

I was very sorry to have to leave the other chaps who were wounded, but as I could only just limp along I could not help them in any way. They were brought in later by stretcher bearers.

A man who was at Paardeburg and Magersfontein, in South Africa, said they were nothing to what we got that Sunday. Out of 240 men of my company only about twenty were uninjured.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 153

*Letter 69.—From an Infantryman in hospital  
(Published in the "Aldershot News") :*

I found myself mixed up with a French regiment on the right. I wanted to go forward with them, but the officer in charge shook his head and smiled, "They will spot you in your khaki and put you out in no time," he said in English; "make your way to the left; you'll find your fellows on that hill." I watched the regiment till it disappeared; then I made my way across a field and up a big avenue of trees. The shells were whistling overhead, but there was nothing to be afraid of. Halfway up the avenue there was a German lancer officer lying dead by the side of the road. How he got there was a mystery, because we had seen no cavalry. But there he lay, and someone had crossed his hands on his breast, and put a little celluloid crucifix in his hands. Over his face was a beautiful little handkerchief—a lady's—with lace edging. It was a bit of a mystery, because there wasn't a lady for miles that I knew of.

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*Letter 70.—From Sapper H. Mugridge, R.E., to his mother at Uckfield :*

We met the Germans at Landrecies on Sunday. We had a fifteen-hour battle. It was terrible. There were 120,000 Germans and only 20,000 of us, but our men fought well. We blew up six bridges. Laid our charges in the afternoon, and the whole time we were doing it were not hit. After we had got everything ready we got back into cover and waited until 1.30 on Monday morning, until our troops had got back over the river, and then we blew up the bridges. We retired about thirty miles. The town where we stopped on Sunday was a beautiful place, but the Germans destroyed it. Close to where I was a church had been used as a hospital, and our wounded were coming by the dozens. But, terrible to say, the Germans blew the place up. They have no pity. They kill our wounded and drive the people before them.

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## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 155

*Letter 71.—From Sapper H. Mugridge, R.E.  
(Second letter, published in the "Sussex Daily  
News") :*

We were laying our gun cotton—ten of us were the last to leave, and the Germans stopped us. We had to run for it down the main street of the town of Landrecies, and, being dark, we could not see where we were going. We got caught in some telegraph wires which had been put across the street. We had to cut them away with our bayonets. On Monday morning, when things were quieter, we went nearly into the German lines. We could hear them giving orders. Our job was to put barbed wire across the road. I was thankful to get out of it. We could see the Germans burning their dead. They must have lost a few thousand men, as our troops simply mowed them down.

I saw one sergeant kill fourteen Germans, one after the other. They came up in fifties, all in a cluster, and you couldn't help hitting them. They were only 400 yards from us all day on Sunday. They are very cruel. Our people used a church for a hospital, and it was filled with our wounded, but the place was shelled and knocked down. They stabbed a good many of our men while lying on the battlefield. They have no



respect for the Red Cross. To see women and children driven from home and walking the roads is terrible—old men and women just the same. At the town where we were we got cut off from our people—eighteen of us—and the houses were being toppled over by the German artillery. The people clung around us, asking us to stay with them, but it was no good. When we left, the town was in flames. But our men did fight well. You never saw anything so cool in your life. Anyone would have thought it was a football match, for they were joking and laughing with one another.

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*Letter 72—From John Baker, of the Royal Flying Corps, to his parents at Boston, Lincolnshire :*

While flying over Boulogne at a height of 3,000 feet, something went wrong with the machine, and the engine stopped. The officer said, "Baker, our time has come. Be brave, and die like a man. Good-bye," and shook hands with me. I shall always remember the ten minutes that followed. The next I remembered was that I was in a barn. I was removed to



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 157

Boulogne, and afterwards to Netheravon, being conveyed from Southampton by motor ambulance.

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### *Letter 73.—From Private G. Rider :*

The Germans are good and bad as fighters, but mostly bad so far as I have seen. They are nearly all long distance champions in the fighting line, and won't come too near unless they are made to. Yesterday we had a whole day of it in the trenches, with the Germans firing away at us all the time. It began just after breakfast, and we were without food of any kind until we had what you might call a dainty afternoon tea in the trenches under shell fire. The mugs were passed round with the biscuits and the "bully" as best they could by the mess orderlies, but it was hard work getting through without getting more than we wanted of lead rations. My next-door neighbour, so to speak, got a shrapnel bullet in his tin mug, and another two doors off had his biscuit shot out of his hand when he was fool enough to hold it up to show it to a chum in the next trench.

We are ready for anything that comes our

way, and nothing would please us better than a good big stand-up fight with the Germans on any ground they please. We are all getting used to the hard work of active service, and you very seldom hear complaints from anybody. The grouse, who are to be found in nearly every regiment, seem to be on holiday for the war.

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*Letter 74.—From Private Martin O'Keefe, of the Royal Irish Rifles, to his friends at Belfast:*

Our part in the fighting was limited almost entirely to covering the retreat by a steady rifle fire from hastily-prepared trenches. We were thrown out along an extended front, and instructed to hold our ground until the retiring troops were signalled safe in the next position allotted them. When this was done our turn came, and we retired to a new position, our place being taken by the light cavalry, who kept the Germans in check as long as they could and then fell back in their turn. The Germans made some rather tricky moves in the hope of cutting us off while we were on this dangerous duty, but our flanks were protected by cavalry, French and

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 159

English, and they did not get very far without having to fight. When they found the slightest show of resistance they retreated, and tried to find an easier way of getting in at us. The staff were well pleased with the way we carried out the duty given to us, and we were told that it had saved our Army from very serious loss at one critical point. We put in some wonderfully effective shooting in the trenches, and the men find it is much easier making good hits on active service than at manœuvres. The Germans seemed to think at first that we were as poor shots as they are, and they were awfully sick when they had to face our deadly fire for the first time.

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### *Letter 75.—From Sergeant W. Holmes :*

We are off again, this time with some of the French, and it's enough to give you fits to hear the Frenchmen trying to pick up the words of "Cheer Boys, Cheer," which we sing with great go on the march. They haven't any notion of what the words mean, but they can tell from our manner that they mean we're in good heart, and that's infectious here. We lost our colonel and four

other officers in our fight on Tuesday. It was the hottest thing we were ever in. The colonel was struck down when he was giving us the last word of advice before we threw ourselves on the enemy. We avenged him in fine style. His loss was a great blow to us, for he was very popular. It's always the best officers, somehow, that get hit the first, and there's not a man in the regiment who wouldn't have given his life for him. He was keen on discipline, but soldiers don't think any less of officers who are that. The German officers are a rum lot. They don't seem in too great a hurry to expose their precious carcasses, and so they "lead" from the rear all the time. We see to it that they don't benefit much by that, you may be sure, and when it's at all possible we shoot at the skulking officers. That probably accounts for the high death rate among German officers. They seem terribly keen on pushing their men forward into posts of danger, but they are not so keen in leading the way, except in retreat, when they are well to the fore. Our cavalry are up to that little dodge, and so, when they are riding out to intercept retreating Germans, they always give special attention to the officers.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 161

*Letter 76.—From Corporal J. Hammersley :*

The Germans in front of us are about done for, and that's the truth of it. They have got about as much fighting as humans can stand, and it is about time they realised it. I don't agree with those who think this war is going to last for a long time. The pace we go at on both sides is too hot, and flesh and blood won't stand it for long. My impression is that there will be a sudden collapse of the Germans that will astonish everybody at home; but we are not leaving much to chance, and we do all we can to hasten the collapse. The Germans aren't really cut out for this sort of work. They are proper bullies, who get on finely when everybody's lying bleeding at their feet, but they can't manage at all when they have to stand up to men who can give them more than they bargain for.

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*Letter 77.—From Lance-Corporal T. Williams :*

We are now getting into our stride and beginning to get a little of our own back out of the Germans. They don't like it at all now that we are nearer to them in numbers, and

their men all look like so many "Weary Willies"; they are so tired. You might say they have got "that tired feeling" bad, and so they have. Some of them just drop into our arms when we call on them to surrender as though it were the thing they'd been waiting for all their lives.

One chap who knows a little English told us he was never more pleased to see the English uniform in all his life before, for he was about fed up with marching and fighting in the inhuman way the German officers expect their men to go on. When we took him to camp he lay down and slept like a log for hours; he was so done up.

That's typical of the Germans now, and it looks as though the Kaiser were going to have to pay a big price for taxing his men so terribly. You can't help being sorry for the poor fellows. They all say they were told when setting out that it would be child's play beating us, as our army was the poorest stuff in the world. Those who had had experience in England didn't take that in altogether, but the country yokels and those who had never been outside their own towns believed it until they had a taste of our fighting quality, and then they laughed with the other side of their faces.



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 163

That's the Germans all over, to "kid" themselves into the belief that they have got a soft thing, and then when they find it's too hard, to run away from it. Our lads have made up their minds to give them no rest once we get on to them, and they'll get as much of the British Army as they can stand, and maybe a little more. The French are greatly pleased with the show we made in the field, and are in much better spirits than they were.

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*Letter 78.—From a Non-commissioned Officer of Dragoons :*

All our men—in fact, the whole British Army—are as fit as a fiddle, and the lads are as keen as mustard. There is no holding them back. At Mons we were under General Chetwode, and horses and men positively flew at the Germans, cutting through much heavier mounts and heavier men than ours. The yelling and the dash of the Lancers and Dragoon Guards was a thing never to be forgotten. We lost very heavily at Mons, and it is a marvel how some of our fellows pulled through and positively frightened the enemy. We did some terrible execution, and our wrists

were feeling the strain of heavy riding before sunset. With our tunics unbuttoned, we had the full use of our right arm for attack and defence.

After Mons I went with a small party scouting, and we again engaged about twenty cavalry, cut off from their main body. We killed nine, wounded six, and gave chase to the remaining five, who, in rejoining their unit, nearly were the means of trapping us. However, our men dispersed and hid in a wood until they fell in with a squadron of the —, and so reached camp in safety. After that a smart young corporal accompanied me to reconnoitre, and we went too far ahead, and were cut off in a part of the country thick with Uhlans. As we rode in the direction of — two wounded men were limping along, both with legs damaged, one from the Middlesex and the other Lancashire Fusiliers, and so we took them up.

Corporal Watherston took one behind his saddle and I took the other. The men were hungry, and tattered to shreds with fighting, but in fine spirits. We soon came across a small village, and I found the curé a grand sportsman and full of pluck and hospitality. He seemed charmed to find a friend who was English, and

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 165

told me that the Germans were dressed in the uniforms of British soldiers, which they took from the dead and from prisoners in order to deceive French villagers, who in many places in that district had welcomed these wolves in sheep's clothing. We were warned that the enemy would be sure to track us up to the village. The curé said he could hide the two wounded men in the crypt of his church and put up beds for them. It has a secret trapdoor, and was an ancient treasure-house of a feudal lord, whose castle we saw in ruins at the top of the hill close by.

Then he hid away our saddlery and uniforms in the roof of a barn, and insisted upon our making a rest-chamber of the tower of his church, which was approached by a ladder, which we were to pull up to the belfry as soon as we got there. He smuggled in wine and meat and bread and cakes, fruit and cigarettes, with plenty of bedding pulled up by a rope. We slept soundly, and the owls seemed the only other tenants, who resented our intrusion. No troops passed through the village that night. In the morning the curé came round at six o'clock, and we heard him say Mass. After that we let down the ladder, and he came up with delicious hot chocolate and a basket of rolls and butter.

Our horses he had placed in different stables a mile apart, and put French "fittings" on them, so as to deceive the enemy. He thinks we are well away from the main body of the German army moving in the direction of Paris, but will not hear of our leaving here for at least three days. But I cried, "Curé, we are deserters!" The old man wept and said, "Deserters, no, no—saviours, saviours; you have rescued France from the torments of slavery."

However, we have now secured complete disguises as French cultivateurs—baggy corderoy trousers, blue shirts, boots, stockings, belt, hat, cravat, everything to match—and as we have not shaved for two weeks, and are bronzed with the sun, I think that the corporal and myself can pass anywhere as French peasants, if only he will leave all the talking to me.

The two wounded soldiers don't wish us to leave them, because I am interpreter, and not a soul speaks English in the village. So we have explained to the curé that we shall stay here until our comrades are able to walk, and then the party of four will push our way out somewhere on horse-back and get to the coast. The sacristan at once offered to be our guide, and it is arranged that we take a carrier's wagon which travels in this

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 167

district and drive our own horses in it, and pick up two additional mounts at a larger village on the way to the coast.

We must get back as soon as ever we can. Nothing could be kinder than the people here, but this is not what we came to France for, and hanging about in a French village is not exactly what a soldier calls "cricket."

You cannot imagine how complete the Germans are in the matter of rapid transport. Large automobiles, such as the railway companies have for towns round Harrogate and Scarborough, built like char-à-bancs, carry the soldiers in batches of fifty, so that they are as fresh as paint when they get to the front. But in point of numbers I think one of our side is a fair match for four of the enemy. I hope that the British public are beginning to understand what this war means. The German is not a toy terrier, but a bloodhound absolutely thirsty for blood.

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*Letter 79.—From Private Tom Savage, to his relatives at Larne :*

At Sea.

Just a line to let you know that we are landing outside ——. They kept us without



any knowledge of how and where we were going till the last moment. I am quite well and extra specially fit. It is good fun on a troopship, and we are going to have a nice little holiday on the Continent. I'll be able to "swank French" when I come back. I'll write a good long letter when I settle down. I'm writing this at tea time just before we land. I have got two very nice chums, Jack Wright, the footballer, who has seen service before, and Billy Caughey, both of Belfast.

#### In France.

I am writing this note while on outpost duty. I can't say where we are, or anything like that, but I am in the best of health and enjoying the life. I am getting a fine hand at French. There is plenty of food and the people are all very nice. It's great fun trying to understand them. Plenty of fruit here, pears and apples galore, and as for bread big long rolls and rings of it, and all very cheap. When you happen to be riding through a town the people give you cigarettes, fruit, chocolates, and cider.

If you are all extra good I'll bring you home a pet German. How is Home Rule getting on? Send me a paper, but I don't know when I'll get it or you'll get this. I suppose the papers are



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 169

full of this ruction. I can write no more as I'll soon have to go on guard.

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*Letter 80.—From Mons. E. Hovelange, of Paris, written on August 30th, to Sir William Collins (Published in the "Sussex Daily News") :*

How serious the situation is here it is hard for you to realize in London. We may be encircled at any moment by these hordes of savages. Such murderous cruelty has never been seen in the annals of war. The Turks and the Bulgarians were no worse. It is the rule to fire on ambulances and slaughter the wounded. I know it from eye-witnesses. The Germans are drunk with savagery. It is an orgy of the basest cruelty. They are rushing Paris at all costs, squandering their men recklessly in overwhelming numbers. Our troops are submerged and can only retreat, fighting desperately, but the spirit of our soldiers is splendid. All the wounded I have seen laugh and joke over their wounds and are burning to have another go at the barbarians. Victory is certain. But what disastrous changes shall we know before it comes. I am prepared for the worst — another month of hopeless struggle

perhaps. But we will fight to the last man. The tide will turn, and then—woe to them. I know you will stand by us in the cause of civilization, common honest truth till the bitter end. But if you want to help us you must hasten.

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*Letter 81.—From a young officer who has been through the whole campaign, from the landing of the British at Boulogne :*

I wish you would try to make the people in England understand that they should be most exceedingly thankful that they are living on an island and not in the midst of the dreadful things which are happening on the Continent. Do enforce upon the public that England must fight this thing out, and must conquer even if it has to spend the blood of its young men like water. It will be far better that every family throughout England should have to sorrow for one of its members than that England should have to go through similar ordeals to those which Continental countries are suffering.

The sight of old women and men fleeing from village to village ; young mothers with babies in arms, with their few personal effects

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 171

on their backs, or in some more fortunate cases with their goods and chattels surrounding the aged grandmother stowed away in an old farm cart, drawn by a nag too venerable to be of service to the State; this is what one has seen daily. Picture to yourself our night marches with the burning villages on all sides set fire to by German shells—and the Germans have been rather careless whether their shells struck fortified and defended positions, or open ones. In some cases the fires were caused intentionally by marauding patrols.

Do not imagine that things are not going well with us. We are all satisfied and confident of the end; but at the same time the only possible end can be gained by sacrifice on the part of those at home only. All is well with me personally; I have a busy time, but it is most interesting work.

IN HOSPITAL.

(1) *At Salisbury.*

A non-commissioned officer of the Royal Field Artillery, invalided home with shrapnel wounds in the thigh, from which he hopes soon to recover, has given this vivid description of his

experiences at the front after passing north of Amiens, to a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent :

Pushing forward from our rest camp, covering from twenty to thirty miles a day, with the infantry marching in front and cavalry protecting us on either flank, we received information that we were within a few hours' march of the enemy. Needless to say, this put us on the alert. There was no funk about us, for we were all anxious to have a go at the Germans, about whom we had heard such tales of cruelty that it made our blood run cold.

Our orders were to load with case shot, for fear of cavalry attack, as shrapnel is of little use against mounted troops. The order was soon obeyed, and after passing the day on the road, we moved across country north of—, where the infantry took up a strong position. We saw the French troops on our right as we moved up to gun positions which our battery commanders had selected in advance. It was Sunday morning when the attack came, and the sun had already lit up the beautiful country. and as I looked across at the villages which lay below in the valley with their silent belfries I thought of my home on the Cotswolds and of

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 173

the bells ringing for morning service. I pictured dad and my sister Nell going to church.

"It was, however, no time for sentiment, for gallopers soon brought the news that the enemy was advancing, and that a cavalry attack might be expected at any moment. Infantry had entrenched themselves along our front, and there was a strong body posted on our flanks and rear. These became engaged first with a large body of Uhlans, who endeavoured to take them by surprise, the front rank rushing forward with the lance and the rear using the sword.

We were on slightly higher ground, and could see the combat, which appeared to be going in our favour. Our men stuck to their ground and shot and bayoneted the Uhlans, who, after ten minutes' fight, made off, but, sad to say, a dreadful fusilade of shrapnel and Maxim fire followed immediately, and our guns also came under fire. To this we readily replied, and must have done some execution, especially to the large masses of infantry that were advancing about a mile away.

We got a favourable "bracket" at once, so our Major said, and we worked our guns for all we were worth, altering fuses and the ranging of our guns as the Germans came nearer. Shells



## 174 In the Firing Line

fell fast around us, some ricocheted, and passed overhead without bursting, ploughing the ground up in our rear, but not a few exploded, and made many casualties. Three of my gun detachment fell with shrapnel bullets, but still we kept the guns going, the officers giving a hand.

At one time we came under the fire of the enemy's machine guns, but two of our 18-pounders put them out of action after a few rounds. The order came at length to retire so as to get a more favourable position, but our drivers failed to bring back all the gun teams, only sufficient to horse four of the guns. The remainder of the animals had been terribly mutilated. These were limbered up, the remainder being for a time protected by the infantry. The Gordons and Middlesex were in the shelter trenches on our left, and the latter regiment was said at one time to be almost overwhelmed, but aid came, and the masses of Prussian infantry were beaten off.

Still, there was terrible slaughter on both sides, and the dead lay in long burrows on the turf. We should have lost our guns to the Uhlans if the infantry had not persevered with the rifle, picking off the cavalry at 800 yards.

It was grand shooting. In the afternoon



## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 175

we slackened fire, as also did the Germans; in fact, we did but little from our new gun positions, as we were destined to cover the retreat of the infantry later on.

As the wounded were brought to the rear we heard of the deeds of heroism from the men of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the fighting line—how an officer stood over the body of a private who had previously saved his life until he had spent his last shot from his revolver, and then fell seriously wounded, to be avenged the next moment by a burly sergeant who plunged his bayonet into the Prussian.

In the ranks of the South Lancashire Regiment, from what has been heard, many deserve the Distinguished Conduct Medal, if not the V.C., for the manner in which they charged masses of German infantry through the village to our front. Uhlans got round behind them, but they did not flinch, although serious gaps were made in their ranks.

A non-commissioned officer of the Medicals related how he saw a party of Fusiliers rush to the aid of their Maxim gun party when Uhlans swept down on them from behind a wood. They accounted for over twenty and lost but one man.

At night we were ordered to move on again,

and we marched south-west in the direction of —, covering twenty miles in the darkness. Our unhorsed guns were got through by splitting up our teams, and with the help of the brawny arms of the infantry.

The enemy were aware of our retreat, and kept up an incessant fire, bringing searchlights to the aid of their gunners. The moon slightly favoured us, and, with the help of local guides, we found our way. I heard of the brilliant work performed by our battalions, who kept the enemy at bay whilst we withdrew all our vehicles, and we gunners felt proud of them. They kept the enemy busy by counter-attack, and made it impossible to get round us.

Next morning the enemy were again in the field endeavouring to force our left flank. Field-Marshal Sir John French, whom we saw early in the day, was, however, equal to the occasion, and so manœuvred his troops that we occupied a position from which the Germans could not dislodge us. The artillery kept up long-range fire, and that is how I received my wound. Within a few minutes first aid was rendered, and I was put in an ambulance and taken off with other wounded to a field hospital, where I met with every attention.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 177

IN HOSPITAL.

(2) *At the London Hospital.*

By a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent.

A description of a thrilling fight in the air, which had a dramatic climax, was given to Queen Alexandra when her Majesty paid a visit to the London Hospital.

Among the wounded soldiers there is a private of the Royal Engineers, who was himself witness of the incident.

He said that following a very hard fight on the day before, he was lying on the ground with his regiment, resting. Suddenly a German aeroplane hove in sight. It flew right over the British troops, and commenced to signal their position to the German camp.

A minute later, amid intense excitement of the troops, two aeroplanes, with English and French pilots, rose into the air from the British rear. Ascending with great rapidity, they made for the German aeroplane, with the intention of attacking it.

At first some of our men, who were very much on the alert, fired by mistake at the French aeroplane. Luckily, their shots went wide.

Then the troops lay still, and with breathless

interest watched the attempts of the French and British aviators to outmanœuvre their opponent, and to cut off his retreat. After a little time the Franco-British airmen abandoned this attempt, and then the Englishman and the German began to fly upwards, in the evident desire to obtain a more favourable position for shooting down from above. Owing to the protection afforded by the machine, it would have been of little use for one aviator to fire at his opponent from below. Once a higher altitude was attained, the opportunity for effective aim would be much greater.

Up and up circled the two airmen, till their machines could barely be distinguished from the ground. They were almost out of sight when the soldiers saw that the British aviator was above his opponent. Then the faint sound of a shot came down from the sky, and instantly the German aeroplane began to descend, volplaning in graceful fashion. Apparently it was under the most perfect control. On reaching the earth the machine landed with no great shock, ran a short distance along the ground, and then stopped.

Rushing to the spot, the British soldiers found, to their amazement, that the pilot was dead.

## From Mons to the Walls of Paris 179

So fortunate had been the aim of the Englishman that he had shot the German through the head. In his dying moments the latter had started to descend, and when he reached the earth his hands still firmly gripped the controls.

The aeroplane was absolutely undamaged, and was appropriated by the British aviators.

### IN HOSPITAL.

(3) *From a "Daily Telegraph" correspondent at Rouen :*

It was known that there were British wounded in Rouen—I had even spoken to one of them in the streets—but how was one to see them? The police commissaire sent me to his central colleague, who sent me on to the état major, who was anxious to send me back to him, but finally suggested that I should see the military commissary at one of the stations. He was courteous, but very firm—the authorisation I asked for could not be, and was not, granted to anyone. At the headquarters of the British General Staff the same answer in even less ambiguous terms.

It was then that Privates X., Y., Z. came to my aid. Private Z. had a request to make of me. It was that I should see to it that the black retriever of his regiment now at the front should



be photographed, and that the photograph should appear in *The Daily Telegraph*. Private Z. had a temperature of 102.5, and looked it, but he was not worrying about that. He was worrying about the photograph of the regimental retriever, which I understood him to say, though dates make it almost incredible. had gone through the Boer campaign, and had not yet had his photograph in the papers. So I met by appointment Privates X., Y., and Z. outside the Hospice Général of Rouen, and by them was franked in to the hospital, where a few dozen of our wounded were sunning themselves. It was just time, and no more, as orders had been received a few minutes before that the British wounded were to be transferred from Rouen to London, for something grave was afoot.

“Do you want to get back to England?” someone called out to a soldier whose arm was in a sling, and the whole sleeve of whose jacket had been ripped by the fragment of a shell.

“Not I,” he shouted; “I want to go to the front again and get my sleeve back, and something more.”

I managed to speak with two or three of the wounded as they were getting ready for the start. One of them, an artilleryman, had been



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injured by his horses falling on him at Ligny, I guessed it was—only guessed, for Tommy charges a French word as bravely and much less successfully than he charges the enemy. It was the same story that one hears from all, of a heroic struggle against overwhelming odds. "They were ten to one against us, in my opinion," he said. "They were all over us. Their artillery found the range by means of aeroplanes. The shell fire was terrible."

He says that it was very accurate, but that fortunately the quality of the shells is not up to that of the shooting. My informant's division held out for twenty-four hours against the overwhelming odds. Then, when the Germans had managed to get a battery into action behind, they retired during the night of Wednesday, steadily and in excellent order, keeping the German pursuit at bay. The next man I spoke to really spoke to me. He was anxious to tell his story.

"I have been in the thick of it," he said; "in the very thick of it. I was one of the chauffeurs in the service of the British General Staff."

He told me that he was not a Regular soldier, but a volunteer from the Automobile Club, an American who had become a naturalised English

citizen, and had once been a journalist. His own injury, a burnt arm, was from a back-fire, but his escape from the German bullets had been almost miraculous. Three staff officers, one after another, had been hit in the body of the car behind him. This is his story :

“On Friday, the 25th, the British were just outside Le Cateau. On Saturday morning the approach of the Germans in force was signalled. On Sunday morning at daybreak a German aeroplane flew over our lines, and, although fired at by the aeroplane gun mounted in the car, and received with volleys from the troops, managed to rejoin its lines. Twenty minutes later the German artillery opened fire with accuracy. The aeroplane, as so often, had done its work as range-finder. For twelve hours the cannonade went on. Then the British forces retreated six miles. On Monday morning the bombardment began again, and at two that afternoon the German forces entered Le Cateau from which the English had retired. Many of the houses were in flames. The Germans, who had ruthlessly bayoneted our wounded if they moved so much as a finger as they lay on the ground, were guilty of brutal conduct when they entered the city.

“On Tuesday, the British, who had retired to

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Landrecies, were again attacked by the Germans. They believed, wrongly, that on their right was a supporting French force. The range was again found by aeroplane, and the British were compelled to evacuate. That was on Tuesday. The British troops had been fighting steadily for four days, but their morale and their spirits had not suffered."

As I write, a detachment of the R.A.M.C. is filing past, and people have risen from their chairs and are cheering and saluting. Half an hour ago Engineers passed with their pontoons decorated with flowers and greenery. The men had flowers in their caps, and even the horses were flower-decked. Tommy Atkins has the completest faith in his leaders and in himself. He quite realises the necessity for secrecy of operations in modern warfare. Of course, he has his own theories. This is one of them textually :

"The Germans are simply walking into it. Of course, we have had losses, but that was part of the plan—the sprat to catch the whale. They are going to find themselves in a square between four allied armies, and then,"—so far Private X., but here Private Y. broke in cheerfully : "And then they will be electrocuted."

And at this moment it begins to look as if

—apart from that detail of the square of four armies—Privates X. and Y. had known what they were talking about; for some few days ago the great retreat came to an abrupt end, the British and French forces carrying out General Joffre's carefully laid plan of campaign, turned their defensive movement into a combined attack, the Germans fell back before them and are still retiring. They marched through Belgium into France with heavy fighting and appalling losses, only to be held in check at the right place and time and beaten back by the road they had come, when Paris seemed almost at their mercy. But that retirement is another story.

## VI

### THE SPIRIT OF VICTORY

*" He only knows that not through HIM  
Shall England come to shame."*

SIR F. H. DOYLE.

EVEN through those three weeks when they were retreating before the enemy, the whole spirit of the British troops was the spirit of men who are fighting to win. There is no hint of doubt or despondency in any of their letters home. They talk lightly of their hardest, most terrible experiences ; they greet the unseen with a cheer ; you hear of them cracking jokes, boyishly guying each other, singing songs as they march and as they lie in the trenches with shells bursting and shots screaming close over their heads. They carried out their retreats grudgingly, but without dismay, in the fixed confidence that their leaders knew what they were after, and that in due time they would find they had only been stooping to

conquer. "They won't let us have a fair smack at them," says "Spratty," of the Army Service Corps, in a letter home. "I have never seen such a sight before. God knows whose turn is next, but we shall win, don't worry." This is the watchword of them all: "Don't worry—we shall win."

"Wine is offered us instead of water by the people," wrote Private S. Browne, whilst his regiment was marching through France to the front; "but officers and men are refusing it. Some of the hardest drinkers in the regiment have signed the pledge for the war."

"Tommy goes into battle," a French soldier told a reporter at Dieppe, "singing some song about Tip-Tip-Tip-Tipperary, and when he is hit he does not cry out. He just says 'blast,' and if the wound is a small one he asks the man next to him to tie a tourniquet round it and settles down to fighting again." A corporal of the Black Watch explained to a hospital visitor, "It was a terrible bit of work. The Germans were as thick as Hielan' heather, and by sheer weight forced us back step by step. But until the order came not a living man flinched. In the



thick of the bursting shells we were singing Harry Lauder's latest."

Trooper George Pritchard wrote to his mother from Netley Hospital the other day: "I got hit in the arm from a shell. Seven of our officers got killed last Thursday, but Captain Grenfell was saved at the same time as me. What do you think of the charge of the 9th? It is worth getting hit for."

"We are all in good heart, and ready for the next round whenever it may come," writes Private J. Scott, from his place in the field; and "South Africa was child's play to what we have been through," writes Corporal Brogan, "but we are beginning to feel our feet now, and are equal to a lot more gruelling."

"We are all beat up after four days of the hardest soldiering you ever dreamt of," Private Patrick McGlade says in a letter to his mother. "I am glad to say we accounted for our share of the Germans. We tried hard to get at them many a time, but they never would wait for us when they saw the bright bits of steel at the business end of our rifles. Some of them squeal like the pigs on killing day when they see the steel ready. Some of our finest lads are now

sleeping their last sleep in Belgium, but, mother dear, you can take your son's word for it that for every son of Ireland who will never come back there are at least three Germans who will never be heard of again. When we got here we sang 'Paddies Evermore,' and then we were off to chapel to pray for the souls of the lads that are gone."

"Some of us feel very strongly about being sent home for scratches that will heal," writes Corporal A. Hands. "Don't believe half the stories about our hardships. I haven't seen or heard of a man who made complaint of anything. You can't expect a six-course dinner on active service, but we get plenty to fight on."

Cases of personal pluck were so common that we soon ceased to take notice of them, a wounded driver in the Royal Artillery told an interviewer. "There was a man of the Buffs, who carried a wounded chum for over a mile under German fire, but if you suggested a Victoria Cross for that man he would punch your head, and as he is a regular devil when roused the men say as little as they can about it. He thinks he didn't do anything out of the common, and doesn't see why his name should be dragged into the papers over it. Another case I heard of was a corporal

of the Fusilier Brigade—I don't know his regiment—who held a company of Germans at bay for two hours by the old trick of firing at them from different points, and so making them think they had a crowd to face. He was getting on very well until a party of cavalry outflanked him, as you might say, and as they were right on top of him there was no kidding about his 'strength,' so he skedaddled, and the Germans took the position he had held so long. He got back to his mates all right, and they were glad to see him, for they had given him up for dead."

"No regiment fought harder than we did, and no regiment has better officers, who went shoulder to shoulder with their men," says a non-commissioned officer of the Buffs, writing from hospital, "but you can't expect absolute impossibilities to be accomplished, no matter how brave the boys are, when you are fighting a force from twenty to thirty times as strong. If some of you at home who have spoken sneeringly of British officers could have seen how they handled their men and shirked nothing you would be ashamed of yourselves. We are all determined when fit again to return and get our own back."

Everywhere you find that the one cry of the soldiers who are invalided home—they are

impatient to be cured quickly and get back "to have another slap at them." We know how our women here at home share that eager enthusiasm in this the most righteous war Britain has ever gone into ; and isn't there something that stirs you like the sound of a trumpet in such a passage as this from the letter a Scottish nun living in Belgium has written to her mother ?

" I am glad England is aroused, and that the British lion is out with all his teeth showing. Here these little lions of Belgians are raging mad and doing glorious things.

" Tell father I am cheery, and feel sometimes far too warlike for a nun. That's my Scottish blood. I hope to goodness the Highlanders, if they come, will march down another street on their way to the caserne, or I shall shout and yell and cheer them, and forget I mustn't look out of the window."

An extract from Sergeant T. Cahill's letter to his friends at Bristol gives you a snap-shot of our women in the firing line, and of the fearless jollity and light-heartedness with which our Irish comrades meet the worst that their enemies can do :

“The Red Cross girls, with their purty faces and their sweet ways, are as good men as most of us, and better than some of us. They are not supposed to venture into the firing line at all, but they get there all the same, and devil the one of us durst turn them away,” and he goes on casually, “Mick Clancy is that droll with his larking and bamboozling the Germans that he makes us nearly split our sides laughing at him and his ways. Yesterday he got a stick and put a cap on it so that it peeped above the trenches just like a man, and then the Germans kept shooting away at it until they must have used up tons of ammunition, and there was us all the time laughing at them.”

But I think there is perhaps nothing in these letters that is more touching or more finely significant than this :

“The other day I stopped to assist a young lad of the West Kents, who had been badly hit by a piece of shell,” writes Corporal Sam Haslett. “He hadn’t long to live, and knew it, but he wasn’t at all put out about it. I asked him if there was any message I could take to any one at home, and the poor lad’s eyes filled with tears as he answered: ‘I ran away from home and ’listed a year ago. Mother

and dad don't know I'm here, but you tell them that I'm not sorry I did it.' When I told our boys afterwards, they cried like babies, but, mind you, that's the spirit that's going to pull England through this war. I got his name and the address of his people from his regiment, and I am writing to tell them that they have every reason to be proud of their lad. He may have run away from home, but he didn't run away from the Germans."

And if you have caught the buoyant, heroic ardour that rings through those careless, unstudied notes our gallant fellows have written home, you know that there is not a man in the firing line who will.





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